

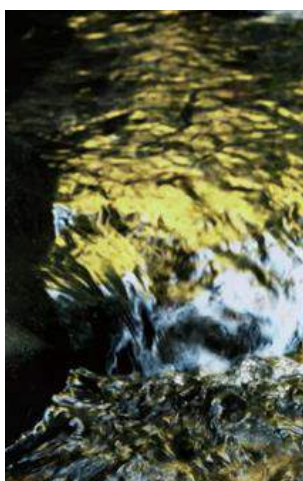


Post-2014 migrants' access to housing, employment and other crucial resources in small- and medium-sized towns and rural areas
in the Netherlands
Country Reports on integration



By Elina Jonitz,
Maria Schiller,
Peter Scholten

Erasmus University
Rotterdam



REPORT
<https://whole-comm.eu>





Abstract

This report looks at post-2014 migrants' access to housing, employment, and other relevant resources in four small and medium-sized towns and rural areas in the Netherlands. Primarily based on interviews conducted in each of the four selected municipalities, it provides an overview of 1) the concrete barriers that post-2014 migrants are facing in relation to housing and employment; 2) the local actors who are involved in, and/or seen as responsible for, facilitating their access; 3) any concrete local measures or practices that help or hinder this access; and 4) the specific target groups of these measures, initiatives or practices.

The report finds that in the Netherlands, access to **housing** for recognized refugees who arrived after 2014 is highly specific because municipalities have the legal obligation to provide housing for them. The process of finding housing is severely impacted by the accumulation of two 'crises' as the Netherlands is currently experiencing a 'housing crisis' and a 'reception crisis'. While the former has led to a shortage of social housing, the latter has increased the pressure on municipalities to find housing as fast as possible. Moreover, the settlement of post-2014 refugees in the localities has at times led to tensions between long-term residents and newcomers in neighborhoods with a higher concentration of social housing.

Access to **employment** is influenced by factors at the individual, macro-economic, policy and governance, and societal level. At the individual level, factors such as educational background, ethnicity, age, gender, and mental health influence a person's chances of finding employment in various, intersecting ways. At the macro-economic level, employers' willingness and openness to hire refugees, the 'voluntary work trap' as well as precarious working conditions play another role in determining a person's economic mobility. At the policy and governance level, refugees are often channeled into the low-skilled sector of the labor market because work is prioritized over education under the national Participation Act. Lastly, at the societal level, discrimination against refugees has a negative influence on people's chances to find long-term, sustainable employment.

Overall, we found that **legal status** is a defining factor in determining access to housing, employment and other services, creating a stratified system where rights and resources are allocated differently to different groups of people.



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1. Introduction

Whole-COMM focuses on small and medium sized municipalities and rural areas (SMsTRA) in eight European and two non-European countries that have experienced and dealt with the increased arrival and settlement of migrants after 2014. More particularly, the research project explores how these communities have responded to the presence of “post-2014 migrants”¹, that is, which policies have been developed and implemented and how these policies shape and enable migrant integration. Taking an innovative Whole-of-Community research approach which conceives of migrant integration as a process of community-making, Whole-COMM pays particular attention to the interactions between multiple actors involved in local integration governance (for example, individuals, public and non-public organizations, institutions and/or corporate entities). Moreover, the project looks at the embeddedness of local actors in multilevel frameworks in which regional, national and EU policies and stakeholders may play a decisive role in shaping local integration policymaking, considering both potential collaborations as well as tensions between actors at different government levels.

Work Package Four (WP4) focuses on local policies, initiatives, and practices addressing post-2014 migrants’ access to housing, employment and other crucial resources or services.

Following the Whole-COMM approach, we assume that the multiple actors involved in integration and community-making processes may have different interests, strategies, resources, and power positions; and that mutual adjustment (between newcomers and long-term residents) and social cohesion do not necessarily represent the only/overall rationale guiding their various efforts. Instead, the interplay between different actors (and their various interests and rationales) may also lead to exclusion and inequality. This interplay and the resulting measures can thus be analyzed in terms of what Collyer, Hinger and Schweitzer call the ‘politics of’, or ‘negotiation around’, ‘(dis)integration’². As these authors point out, integration/disintegration or cohesion/fragmentation should not be understood as simple binary categorizations but as processes that are intertwined and often coexist within and across policies and everyday practices.

By looking at how a wide range of actors (private actors, civil society actors and street level bureaucrats) foster but sometimes also hinder migrants’ access to adequate housing, work

¹ The group of migrants that arrived in (Western) Europe after 2014 is very heterogeneous, “but mostly comprises migrants that left from areas of political and humanitarian crises” (Caponio & Pettrachin, 2021, 1-2). The majority of ‘post-2014 migrants’ entered thus as asylum-seekers but may have obtained different legal statuses by now (see for more detail Caponio & Pettrachin 2021, Working Paper 1 for the Whole-COMM project).

² Collyer M., Hinger S., Schweitzer R. (2020) Politics of (Dis)Integration – An Introduction. In: Hinger S., Schweitzer R. (eds) Politics of (Dis)Integration. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25089-8_1



and other crucial resources or services, we hope to better understand (and be able to compare) these local politics of (dis)integration across different local and national contexts.

The choice of focusing on housing and employment follows two main rationales. First, they are key resources for granting fundamental rights and facilitate sustainable integration. Second, they are not exclusively dependent on local administrations but involve a diverse range of actors, thus allowing us to fully apply the Whole-of-Community research approach. Housing is (partly or, in some cases, almost completely) in the hands of private actors, from big owners (including banks and international investment funds) to small ones. Work depends on employers, which again are very diverse ranging from big to small (including family) employers, from private to public employers and across different economic sectors. In both cases, between migrants and these private actors, we find a broad range of intermediaries (CSOs, trade unions, real estate agencies, civil society organizations, social networks, etc.) and a diverse (and sometimes even contradictory) set of policies and programs (at the national, regional, and local levels). Apart from housing and employment, WP4 is also interested in local policies, initiatives or practices that affect post-2014 migrants' access to other relevant resources and services, which might be specific to each national context.

To assess the role and understand the interplay of the different actors in relation to migrants' access to housing, work, and other services and resources, WP4 identifies and analyses:

- Major **obstacles/challenges** that are reported to exist in each locality for post-2014 migrants, particularly focusing on those that are perceived as being particular to each locality.
- The **actors** (public, private, and civil society) involved, and their concrete role (e.g., as initiator, promoter, implementer, critic, etc. of a concrete policy, initiative, or practice).
- Concrete **local policies, initiatives, and practices** that intend/help to overcome these obstacles. There might also be certain policies, initiatives and practices that have exclusionary effects (whether intended or unintended) and thus aggravate existing obstacles and inequalities in terms of access to adequate housing and employment.
- The **target groups of local policies, initiatives, or practices**: who is entitled to particular services and how is this entitlement justified³. This question will allow us to delve into the main deservingness frames regarding migrants' access to housing, employment and other key resources and services.

³ When explaining who is the target of a specific policy or practice, also those who are excluded (e.g., because they are covered by other policies or because they are simply left out or perceived as less vulnerable) are automatically identified (whether implicit or explicitly).

2. Methodology

The cases for the research project were selected based on a set of variables, namely:

Population size	Medium town: 100,000 – 250.000 Small town: 50,000 – 100,000 Rural area: 5,000 - 50,000 and low population density
Presence of a reception center AND/OR reception facilities	Time period: 2014-2017
Number of currently residing migrants	Time period: arrived after 2014
Share of foreign residents	Time period: in 2005 (SF2005)
Variation of unemployment level	Time period: 2005-2014 (VARUN)
AND/OR unemployment levels	Time period: 2005 and 2014
Variation of number of inhabitants	Time period: 2005-2014 (VARNI)
Regional variation	For example: East / West or North / South, choosing localities from different regions
Local politics	Parties in government and local political tradition, choosing localities with different political traditions (conservative / progressive)

Table 1: Overview of the selection variables

The variables *share of foreign residents* in 2005 (SF2005), *variation of unemployment level* between 2005 and 2014 (VARUN) and *variation of number of inhabitants* between 2005 and 2014 (VARNI) were used to identify **four** types of localities:

Type	Characteristics	Selected cases in the Netherlands
Type A	Recovering local economy and improving demographic profile, migrants' settlement before 2014	Municipality A = medium size town Province Utrecht, region: West
Type B	Improving economic and demographic situation, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	Municipality B = Small town Province South Holland, region: West
Type C	Demographic and economic decline, migrants' settlement before 2014	Municipality C = Small town Province Overijssel, region: East
Type D	Economic and demographic decline, no remarkable arrivals of migrants before 2014	Municipality D = Rural area Province Drenthe, region: North-East

Table 2: Overview of the selected cases

In the Netherlands, four cases were selected.⁴ To ensure regional variation, the four selected cases are distributed across four provinces, namely South Holland and Utrecht in the West of the Netherlands and Overijssel and Drenthe in the East and the North of the country, respectively.

Empirical data for this report was collected in the period October 2021 until April 2022. Data collection comprised document analysis and semi-structured qualitative interviews with respondents at the local, regional/provincial, and national level. Potential respondents were sampled based on their (professional) positions, e.g., as local official working on integration in a municipality or employee in an NGO offering non-profit services to refugees. Most respondents were contacted through email first (usually in Dutch), occasionally followed by a reminder and a call. After establishing first contacts in a municipality, other respondents were identified using the method of 'snowball sampling' (Bryman 2016). In total, 71 interviews with 80 respondents were conducted; additionally, the researcher had two unrecorded, informal conversations with local volunteers. Of the 71 interviews, 65 interviews were recorded; based on the preference of the respondents, 68 interviews were conducted in Dutch, 3 in English. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most interviews scheduled after November 2021 (when the Dutch government announced stricter regulations) were conducted online (41 interviews).

⁴ Importantly, the four selected cases may (slightly) vary from the ideal typical typology.

Importantly, the research in the Netherlands focuses on the governance of integration of *statushouders*. *Statushouders* are asylum seekers with a residence permit, that is, their asylum claim has been approved. For this report, the term ‘refugee’ or ‘recognized refugee’ will be used to refer to the group of ‘*statushouders*’ to differentiate them clearly from the group of asylum seekers that have not (yet) received a final decision on their asylum claim and hence do not fall under the responsibility of local governments and are not considered under the Civic Integration Act as ‘obligated to integrate’.⁵

The focus on *recognized* refugees can be explained as follows: First, we follow the overall project’s focus on post-2014 migrants that have arrived in Europe in an ‘irregular’ manner after 2014 (Caponio & Pettrachin, 2021). Second, asylum seekers without a status are not officially registered at a municipality and do not fall under the nationally defined Civic Integration Act, that is, they are (with exceptions) not targeted by national and local integration policies. Third, other ‘types’ of migrants such as labor migrants from EU Member States or ‘knowledge migrants’ from third countries follow a very different legal, housing, and economic trajectory and are often not explicitly addressed in national and local integration policies. Accordingly, explanations about the national and local legal framework, about the characteristics of the four localities and persons’ access to rights and services revolve predominantly around the group of ‘recognized refugees’ who are registered as residents in the localities. Where necessary, main similarities and differences between different ‘types’ of migrants will be touched upon, for instance with regards to labor market integration.

3. National context & the four cases

3.1 General information on the national context

3.1.1 The Dutch housing market and the relevant policy framework

The Dutch housing market is characterized by a large social sector – in fact the largest social sector in Europe (Schilder & Scherpenisse, 2018). In 2020, the share of social housing accounted for 26% of the available rental housing stock.⁶ Importantly, social housing in the Netherlands usually means “housing owned by housing associations that are rented out under rent regulation” (Schilder & Scherpenisse, 2018, p. 82) and for which the monthly rent cannot exceed 763,47€. Despite this relatively large social sector, there is currently a significant

⁵ Importantly, in other contexts the term ‘refugee’ is also used to refer to persons fleeing war, violence, conflict, or persecution (UNHCR) more broadly (not exclusively to refer to those who are officially recognized as refugees and have been granted a residence permit accordingly).

⁶ More information can be found on the portal *Datawonen* of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK): <https://datawonen.nl>.

shortage of affordable housing which is why the national government aims for 250.000 new social homes in 2030 (Vugts & Hetebrij, 2022). The shortage of (social) housing is reflective of what is popularly referred to as the ‘housing crisis’ in the Netherlands, marked by an ‘overheated’ housing market where prices are ‘going through the roof’ and – concomitantly – affordability of housing is increasingly worsening, especially for lower income households (Schilder & Scherpenisse, 2018). Overall, the situation of the housing market appears to be more critical in the West of the country (namely in the densely populated metropolitan region Randstad), although the consequences of the ‘housing crisis’ are also increasingly felt in the other parts of the Netherlands (N-C-6, N-D-10).⁷ Respondents in localities C and D note, for instance, that people are moving from the West to the North/East because housing there is (presumably) still more available and affordable.

With regards to the relevant legal framework which facilitates access to housing for refugees, two national laws are decisive: the Law Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (1994) and – most importantly – the Housing Act (2014) in which the legal task of ‘housing of refugees with a residence permit’ (*Taakstelling huisvesting vergunninghouders*) is defined.

Importantly, refugees in the Netherlands are distributed across the country via a *national dispersal mechanism*.⁸ Within two weeks after receiving their residence permit, recognized refugees are allocated to municipalities by the national implementing body COA (the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), taking into consideration various factors such as family size, country of origin, language, education, work experience, work contract, existing networks, medical details or plans for the future (Rijksoverheid Huisvesting Statushouder, 2022). The national level determines every six months the number of residence permit holders that each municipality has to accommodate. Municipalities usually have limited say in how many and who is going to stay in their local community. To fulfil their task, (most) municipalities have a “*prestatieafpraak*” (performance agreement) with local housing corporations, which assign refugees to available social housing (N-SH). Based on a specific regulation, refugees can be prioritized for accessing social housing. However, since 2017

⁷ For national and regional level respondents, the acronym N – [institutional affiliation] is used to quote and refer to the respective interviewees in the report. For example: N-SZW is a respondent from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid*). For local level respondents, the acronym N - [locality type A/B/C/D] - [number of interviewee] is used to quote and refer to the respective interviewees in the report. For example: N-A-1 is respondent no. 1 from locality A. Importantly, the numbering does *not* follow a chronological order. An overview of all the acronyms can be found in the appendix in table 1.

⁸ Asylum seekers are similarly dispersed across the country after their arrival; however, asylum seekers are allocated to the reception centers, while recognized refugees are linked to a particular municipality. There are currently approximately 130 reception centers which host asylum seekers, rejected asylum seekers and refugees waiting for their housing (<https://www.coa.nl/nl/locatiezoeker>). While not every municipality has a local reception center, *all* municipalities have the obligation to house recognized refugees (after they leave the reception center).

refugees do not automatically receive a priority status anymore (N-O; Rijksoverheid Huisvesting Statushouder, 2022).⁹ The implementation of this legal task is supervised by the provinces who have various possibilities to intervene if municipalities fail to meet the set target number. On paper, municipalities have ten weeks to find appropriate accommodation for refugees; in practice this takes oftentimes much longer due to the current tense housing market (N-JenV_2).

Various respondents from the national and regional level emphasize the interrelatedness of the areas of reception (*opvang*), housing (*huisvesting*) and integration (*integratie/inburgering*) of refugees. The official integration process (*inburgering*) starts when refugees live in the municipality they have been assigned to (N-VNG). However, due to the current 'housing crisis' and the overall shortage of (social) housing, recognized refugees often have to stay for an extended period of time in reception centers, before they can move to a house in the municipality they are assigned to, delaying their integration process significantly (N-O, N-SH, N-VNG, N-SZW, N-JenV_1).

Another challenge derives from the fact that once asylum seekers have been granted a residence permit, they do not necessarily stay in the province in which the reception center is located, making it difficult for municipalities to establish ties with the (potential) new resident early on. Moreover, the existing reception structure is not able to adapt to the at times significant fluctuation of numbers of asylum seekers arriving in the Netherlands (N-G40). This has become again apparent in the past months in which the 'reception crisis' has led to asylum seekers sleeping on chairs in the overcrowded first reception facility in Ter Apel and to new calls for the establishment of a more sustainable reception system (VluchtelingenWerk Press Report, 2022).

To address these issues, in 2020 national, provincial, and local governments have drafted the *Uitvoeringsagenda Flexibilisering Asielketen* (Implementation Agenda for the Flexibilization of the Asylum Chain), "an important document that outlines how the Netherlands is going to organize its 'reception landscape' in the medium- and long-term" (N-G40). One crucial goal of the agenda is the implementation of regional reception localities (ROL) to ensure that asylum seekers who stay in one region during their asylum procedure will also be assigned to a municipality in the same region after receiving their residence permit, thereby making sure they can start their integration process early on.¹⁰

⁹ The priority regulation is currently again under discussion, driven by right-wing parties at the national level which see an unfair advantage in giving refugees an 'urgency treatment' just because they are refugees (<https://nos.nl/artikel/2430979-kamer-worstelt-met-voorrang-voor-statushouders-in-tijden-van-woningnood>)

¹⁰ The interrelatedness of the three areas reception, housing and integration and the need to look at these areas more comprehensively, is also addressed in the "*Integrale handreiking voor opvang, huisvesting en inburgering*" (2021) compiled by the VNG, IPO, COA, and the ministries JenV, SZW en BZK as well as the "*Integrale*

An example of a more short-term solution to the challenge of providing housing for refugees, is the national ‘hotel and accommodation regulation’ (*hotel- en accommodatieregeling*) which started in November 2021 and ends in August 2022 (N-JenV_2). The hotel and accommodation regulation (HAR) allows municipalities to offer refugees who have been linked to the municipality temporary accommodation for up to six months (for example, in local hotels). The national implementing body COA pays the municipalities a specific sum per refugee, comprising, for instance, an additional 1000€ to provide guidance/support or to organize social activities for people.¹¹ This temporary housing arrangement gives municipalities more time to arrange for actual permanent housing to fulfil their legal task (N-JenV_2). Besides the HAR, there are also other ‘softer’ policies such as the *logeerregeling* (lodging arrangement), giving refugees the possibility to stay with a host family for three months. Here, COA works together with the non-profit foundation Takecarebnb. The policy officer describes that in this soft policy “reception, housing and integration are combined in the purest form” (N-JenV_2) because refugees are given the chance to leave the reception center earlier, and to start their integration – that is, learn the language and get ‘accustomed to the ‘Dutch’ way of living – while staying at someone’s home and building a social network.¹² The representative of the province Overijssel highlights further that housing can be arranged flexibly in numerous ways, for instance by providing temporary housing in (old) office buildings or by turning old shops or shipping containers into homes (N-O).

After describing the particularities of the Dutch housing market and the legal framework facilitating access to housing for refugees, we now turn to the labor market in the Netherlands and relevant policies with regards to migrants’ access to employment.

3.1.2 The Dutch labor market and the relevant policy framework

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy in the Netherlands experienced a severe contraction in 2020 after six years of growth (OECD report, 2021). Nonetheless, the Dutch economy is generally “well known for its stability, moderate inflation, low unemployment and consistent export surplus” (Kołodziejcki, 2015, p. 15). In 2021, the Netherlands had the fourth highest per capita GDP in the European Union (after Denmark, Ireland, and Luxembourg) (OCED data, 2022). Similarly, the unemployment rate in the Netherlands is relatively low compared to other EU Member States (according to CBS, in 2022,

Uitvoeringsagenda - van Asiel tot en met Integratie” published in 2021 by the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), Divosa and the city network G40, asking for a (better) collaboration between the national government and municipalities to be more efficient in the way asylum, integration and housing are currently organized for vulnerable groups (labor migrants, refugees, and others).

¹¹ More information can be found in the factsheet published by the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG): <https://vng.nl/sites/default/files/2021-11/hotel-en-accommodatieregeling-factsheet.pdf>.

¹² More information on this soft policy can be found here <https://takecarebnb.org>.

only 3,5 percent of the active labor force was unemployed), and between 2019 and 2021 the country had the highest employment rate in the EU (80.8% of the working age population – OECD data, 2022b).

The Netherlands has a highly advanced ICT infrastructure as well as strong petrochemical, electromechanical and food industries, making it the EU's second largest exporter of agricultural products (OECD, 2021). Currently, the country is facing an increasing shortage of labor in many industries¹³ – leading once more to the discussion if attracting (more) labor migrants and/or employing (more) refugees could potentially be a partial solution for such shortages (N-JenV_1). A trade union representative pointedly argues that

The Dutch economy actually revolves around low-paid work, (especially) in the logistics sector. The Netherlands is a country where goods arrive, and goods leave. So, the Netherlands is actually a logistics company on the one side and on the other side it is an agricultural company. But the Dutch society does not want to do these jobs, this is why migrants have to come.

This statement links also more generally to the fact that the overall positive picture of the Dutch labor market is not always reflected in the situation of residents with a migration background and post-2014 refugees: for these groups, the unemployment rate is generally higher than the national average (CPB/SCP 2020), and their working situation is often more precarious, marked, for instance, by various forms of discrimination, temporary, flexible employment at the 'onderkant' (bottom) of the labor market, and exploitation (N-FNV_2). According to the most recent publication on 'Asylum and Integration' by CBS (2021), 41% of the group of refugees who received a residence permit in 2014 has a job now. Of this group, by far the most have a part-time job (73%) and a temporary contract (84%); three % are self-employed. Almost 30% of employed refugees work in the temporary employment sector (*uitzendbranche*), followed by the hospitality industry (22%) and the trade sector (19%). The position of most refugees improves but remains nonetheless precarious; while more people are working and following an education, most continue working with temporary contracts, and only for a few hours (expert on integration policymaking).

With regards to labor market participation, the national Participation Act (2015) plays a crucial role. The Participation Act regulates that municipalities are expected to provide additional support for those who can work but are not able to find a job by themselves (e.g., persons with a 'distance' to the labor market, or persons with a 'work restriction'). To implement this task, municipalities receive funding from the national government. The Participation Act is especially relevant when looking at the integration of refugees because the act concerns the labor market (re-)integration of social welfare recipients. Once refugees start living in a

¹³ More information and numbers can be found in the article published by the CBS in May 2022: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2022/20/meer-bedrijven-ervaren-tekorten-aan-personeel-en-materialen>

municipality, they start receiving welfare benefits and thus fall under the target group of the Participation Act. The goal of the Participation Act is creating more jobs for more people and thus increase labor market participation (Rijksoverheid Participatiewet, 2022). Municipalities have a central role in the local implementation of the national law, that is, they have much freedom to implement the local participation policy in their own way. An important starting point is to increase the capacities of citizens. Municipalities can moreover individually decide if they expect social welfare recipients to offer a compensation, for example in form of ‘socially useful work or other activities’. Interestingly, the respondent of the Association of Dutch Municipalities notes with regards to the Participation Act that in theory, the Participation Act and the national Civic Integration Act are supposed to complement and strengthen each other. Yet, in practice, there are sometimes discussions over which law should be prioritized: in some cases, local officials have to decide if the possibility of having a paid job, regardless of what type, trumps the importance of having a job that allows for enough time to learn the language. In other words, is the goal of the Participation Act to support people in finding a job as fast as possible more (or less) important than the goal of the Civic Integration Act to learn the Dutch language properly? This dilemma is also described across all four localities and will be discussed in detail later on.

Besides the mainstream Participation Act, some municipalities have also developed more targeted policies or started funding other organizations to facilitate access to employment for refugees. These policies and subsidies will be discussed in the chapters below.

Moving away from government actors, trade unions can be seen as relevant actors and lobbyists for the rights of labor migrants and refugees.¹⁴ All trade union respondents describe that labor migrants and refugees are often subjected to discrimination and precarious working conditions. Here, trade unions are involved in various ways: 1) through campaigns and lobbying at the national level with the goal to improve migrants’ labor market position (especially labor migrants, but also refugees), 2) through raising awareness internally among union members for the topic of diversity and inclusion, or 3) through offering trainings for companies with regards to the employment of refugees (N-CNV). Last but not least, some regional union offices have in the past set up programs specifically for migrants, for example to support them during their application process (N-D-15).

Before zooming into how access to housing and employment is perceived and negotiated in the four localities, the four cases will be introduced.

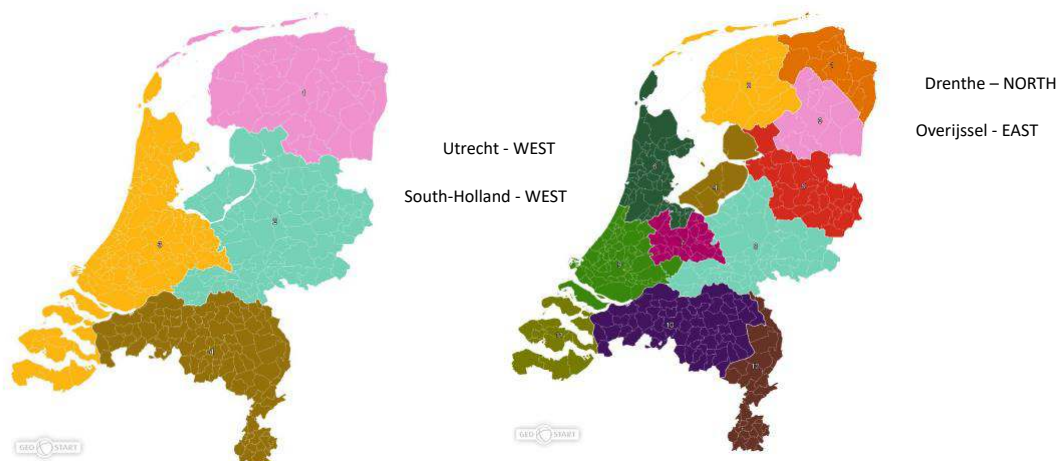
¹⁴ Here, the differentiation is often made between refugees or asylum seekers and labor migrants from primarily Central and Eastern European countries (Poland, Bulgaria and Rumania) whose labor market position is often equally – if not more – precarious because they are (often) not registered in the municipalities, have difficulties finding housing, often lack health insurance and are deprived from accessing elementary (labor) rights (N-FNV_1). Conversely, refugees are assigned housing and they receive social welfare benefits by the municipality.

3.2 Introducing the cases

This section will first provide a brief overview of the four provinces, in particular regarding population size, share of residents with a ‘migration background’ and the reception of asylum seekers as well as recognized refugees over the past years. Following the description of the provinces, the four selected localities will be introduced in more detail.

3.2.1 The four provinces

As previously mentioned, the four selected communities are distributed across four provinces, namely Utrecht (locality A) and South-Holland (locality B) in the West of the Netherlands and Overijssel (locality C) and Drenthe (locality D) in the East and the North of the country, respectively.



Source: <https://www.regioatlas.nl/kaarten>

The Western provinces South-Holland and Utrecht are part of the ‘Randstad’, a densely populated metropolitan region, including the biggest cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht. With its high demand for labor and direct access to the sea, the region has since long attracted migrants from different parts of the world. Over the past twenty years, the population of the two Western provinces has become increasingly more diverse: South Holland experienced an increase in the share of population with a ‘migration background’ from 23% in 2000 to more than 33% in 2021, while the numbers in the province Utrecht (23,8% in 2021) are comparable to the national average of 24,6%.¹⁵ In contrast, the

¹⁵ The national statistical office, Statistics Netherlands (CBS), defines a person with a migration background as a “person of whom at least one parent was born abroad.” CBS further differentiates between persons with a Western migration background and persons with a non-Western migration background. The latter category refers to persons “originating from a country in Africa, South America or Asia (excl. Indonesia and Japan) or from



North and the East of the Netherlands are less densely populated and both regions have a considerably lower number of residents with a 'migration background'. In Drenthe, the number of residents with a 'migration background' has slightly increased from 8% in 2000 to 10% in 2021; Overijssel has experienced an increase from 12,8% to more than 16 %, of which 9 % account for migrants from 'non-Western countries' (compared to 4,8% in Drenthe).

Asylum seekers have been hosted throughout the country in reception centers in different types of localities, including rural areas, mid-sized towns, and big cities, with a higher share of reception facilities in the Eastern and Northern part of the Netherlands and in small(er) municipalities. All four provinces have accommodated asylum seekers as well as recognized refugees, although the numbers differ significantly over time and across provinces. South-Holland, the biggest and most densely populated province in the sample with 3.7 million residents, had to accommodate 6.138 refugees in 2015 and 2.527 in 2020. The highly urbanized province Utrecht with its 1.36 million residents was asked to accommodate 2.159 refugees in 2015 and 934 in 2020. In comparison, the less densely populated and most rural province Drenthe with 494.000 residents had to accommodate 840 refugees in 2015 and 343 in 2020. Lastly, Overijssel with ca. 1.17 million residents was asked to accommodate 1.958 refugees in 2015 and 803 in 2020. In total, the four provinces accommodated around 38 % of the total number of refugees in both 2015 and 2020.¹⁶

Importantly, the geographical positionality of the localities in the provinces also influences the topics of housing and employment. For example, municipalities A and B's location in the "Netherlands' major population and employment agglomeration" (EURES, 2022) is important as it also determines the shortage of housing in the localities (the Randstad is densely populated, and the housing market is therefore denser than in other parts of the Netherlands), as well as the available job opportunities for refugees (there are more job opportunities compared to the East of the country).¹⁷ In locality B for example, the actual job opportunities in the town itself are limited but because of its good connection to bigger cities in the surrounding, the general employment level is rather high.

Turkey" (CBS: <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/onze-diensten/methods/definitions/person-with-a-migration-background>). As of 2022, this differentiation will be replaced by new categories which will be based on continents and common immigration countries (see for more details: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/longread/statistische-trends/2022/nieuwe-indeling-bevolking-naar-herkomst/2-de-nieuwe-herkomstindeling-in-het-kort>.) Since the cases for this research were selected using statistical data from 2021 and earlier, the 'old' categories will be used.

¹⁶ All data presented in this section is derived from CBS (Statistics Netherlands).

¹⁷ More information on the labor market situation in all twelve provinces can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/living-and-working/labour-market-information/labour-market-information-netherlands_en.

The four localities

	Municipality A	Municipality B	Municipality C	Municipality D
	Medium size town	Small town	Small town	Rural area
Province / Region	Province Utrecht, Region: West	Province South Holland, Region: West	Province Overijssel, Region: East	Province Drenthe, Region: North
Size	140.000 – 170.000	50.000 – 80.000	50.000 – 80.000	20.000 – 40.000
Population composition	25% with migration background (2021)	12% with migration background (2021)	27% with migration background (2021)	9% with migration background (2021)
Demographics	Population growth Slightly ageing population	Population growth Ageing population	Population growth Ageing population	Population decline Ageing Population
Employment	Unemployment level lower than national average	Unemployment level lower than national average	Unemployment level higher than national average	Unemployment level similar to national average
Political orientation (2018-2022)	Progressive & conservative	Center / center-right (Christian conservative)	Conservative	Conservative/moderate with strong local party

Table 3: Overview of the selected cases

3.2.2 Municipality A (province Utrecht, medium size)

Municipality A lies in the province Utrecht in the West of the Netherlands and has approximately 140.000 to 170.000 residents.¹⁸ More than 25% of the local population has a ‘migration background’ (2021), of which more than 16% are categorized as ‘non-Western’. The share of foreign residents has increased in the last 10 years by approximately 2% (more than 2% for ‘non-Western’). These numbers are similar to the national average where almost 25% of the population has a migration background (of which 14% are categorized as ‘non-Western’). In the survey, all six respondents noted accordingly that the city has also before 2014 ‘always been hosting people from other countries and exchanging with them’. In 2020, approximately 1200 adult refugees resided in the municipality (Benchmark Divosa, 2020). A member of the local government estimates that each year between 100 and 150 refugees arrive in the city; according to him “*gaat [het] niet om gigantische aantallen*” (we do not talk about huge numbers). Due to the fact that the municipality does not have a regular reception

¹⁸ For anonymization purposes, the exact number of residents will not be disclosed.



center, the city does not host a lot of asylum seekers. However, in situations with a higher influx of asylum seekers the city has provided emergency shelters (in 2015, the city hosted more than 100 refugees, mainly from Syria). Overall, the local population has grown over the past 10 years and has, on average, become slightly older, that is the ratio between the number of people aged 65 or over and the number of people aged 20 to 65 (“grey pressure”) has increased by 6% (compared to the national average of more than 10%) (CBS).

The political orientation of the city is a ‘mixed’ one: Progressive and (conservative) Christian democratic parties together hold the majority of seats in the municipal council (until the elections in March 2022). The member of the local government responsible for integration has an affiliation with a progressive party. Respondents refer to the Christian community in the city to explain residents’ social engagement towards refugees (N-A-1, N-A-6, N-A-8, N-A-12).

Based on the survey, the economic situation in the city can be described as “rather good” (4 respondents) to “very good” (3 respondents). In the past five years, both the number of jobs as well as the number of companies have increased significantly (LISA and I&O Research). The unemployment level is lower than national average and on average there are fewer people with a low educational background. However, when comparing the labor market participation of persons with a ‘Dutch’ background to persons with a ‘non-Western migration background’ it becomes apparent that the latter is on average less often employed: for example, in 2020, almost 75% of persons with a ‘Dutch’ background were working, compared to 65% of persons with a ‘non-Western migration background’.

Similar to the rest of the country, the local housing market in the city is described as ‘overheated’ and characterized by a “big shortage of social housing” as well as a “stuck free market” due to a shrinking number of housing available for rent or purchase (performance agreement, 2021). Approximately 27% of the available rental housing is social housing (slightly above average; BZK datawonen, 2020).

With regards to the topic of integration more generally almost all interviewees describe the situation in the city as positive and welcoming (N-A-1, N-A-3, N-A-5, N-A-9). Besides the involvement of volunteers, respondents emphasize that there is a high number of informal organizations and initiatives working with migrants and refugees, ranging from migrant-led organizations over various language cafes and buddy projects to neighborhood-based initiatives focusing more generally on social cohesion (N-A-3 N-A-4 N-A-6 N-A-8 N-A-9). Lastly, respondents highlight that the topic of integration has received ‘a lot of attention’ and support from the local government and the municipal council.

Nonetheless, respondents also mention challenges and critical points regarding refugee integration, namely spatial segregation in and between neighbourhoods, social tensions related to (perceived) cultural or religious differences between different groups (N-A-1, N-A-6, N-A-7, N-A-8) and difficulties for refugees to find *paid* employment (N-A-3, N-A-6, N-A-13).

3.2.3 Municipality B (South Holland, small town)

Municipality B lies in the province South Holland in the West of the Netherlands and has approximately 50.000 to 80.000 residents. The municipality comprises three smaller towns that merged in 2006. Respondents describe the locality as “*redelijk overzichtelijk*” (relatively manageable) (N-B-3) and as small enough to have ‘short lines’ within the municipal administration, and between the municipality and other local institutions (N-B-2, N-B-8); but “big enough to have a municipal official specifically working on the topic of integration” (N-B-8). Due to its small size, the local government is “close to its residents” and it is not easy to “just disappear or be overlooked” (ibid.). This is also reflected in the fact that the member of the local government is present when refugees sign their participation statement.¹⁹

Less than 15% of the local population has a ‘migration background’, of which less than 6% are categorized as ‘non-Western’. The share of foreign residents has increased in the last 10 years by approximately 3% (almost 2% for ‘non-Western’). These numbers are significantly lower than the national average where almost 25% of the population has a migration background (of which 14% are categorized as ‘non-Western’). Since 2013, approximately 350 adult recognized refugees reside in the municipality. On average, 30-40 refugees arrive on a yearly basis (policy document, 2019). The number of arrivals of both asylum seekers and refugees in the municipality changes, sometimes significantly, in perceived ‘crisis’ situation such as the one in 2015/2016 when the local reception center hosted almost double the amount of people it usually does. Overall, the local population has grown over the past 10 years (by more than 5%) and has aged significantly (also compared to the national average) (CBS).

The political orientation in the municipality can be described as “center or center-right” with the majority of the seats in the municipal council being held by Christian democratic parties (until the elections in March 2022). On a more general note, the Christian foundation of the municipality is a crucial characteristic of the locality: In almost all interviews, municipality B is described as Christian municipality – an aspect that seems to play an important role in the self-identification of the residents. Yet, the ‘Christian identity’ of the locality, combined with its relatively small size, is evaluated very differently: for some, it explains the commitment of residents to help refugees (importance of charity); for others, it shows why there is a distance between newcomers and long-term residents as the local tight-knit community is seen as potential barrier to integration (N-B-2, N-B-5, N-B-8, N-B-11). According to an employee from the local library, the municipality has a “pretty white monoculture”.

In terms of economics, the unemployment level is significantly lower than the national average, while the average national income is somewhat higher than the local average

¹⁹ After starting their civic integration, refugees have one year to sign their participation statement. By doing so, they state that they “will actively participate in Dutch society and [...] respect what is important in the Netherlands.” (<https://www.inburgeren.nl/en/taking-the-integration-exam/participation-statement.jsp>).



(Economische Agenda 2015, p. 47; CBS). Based on data collected in the survey, most respondents see an improvement in the economic situation from “rather good” in 2014 to “very good” in 2021, with only one respondent describing the economic situation as “rather bad” in 2021 (survey data). There are relatively few highly educated residents and illiteracy is seen as a challenge, especially among those “who left school early and started working as a fisherman or in construction” (N-B-8; N-B-5; Economische Agenda, 2015). Important economic sectors comprise agriculture, the food and metal industry, and tourism. The respondent of the service provider responsible for labor market integration highlights that “there are no big tech or corporate (service) companies”, which is sometimes seen as challenging for the integration of highly skilled migrants. According to the respondent, there are many jobs in the low skilled sector (especially in the flower industry) which are not suitable for persons with a university degree who also often have different ambitions. When comparing the labor market participation of persons with a ‘Dutch’ background to persons with a ‘non-Western migration background’ it becomes apparent that the latter is (again) on average less often employed: for example, in 2020, almost 73% of persons with a ‘Dutch’ background were working, compared to 62% of persons with a ‘non-Western migration background’.

Similar to the rest of the country, the local housing market in the small town is characterized by an “increasing scarcity and persistently high demand for housing” (Woonagenda 2020-2024, p. 10). Approximately 25% of the available rental housing is social housing (slightly below average; BZK datawonen, 2020).

When looking at the topic of immigrant integration more specifically, municipality B can best be described by the term “*dubbel*”, that is, residents’ attitude towards refugees in particular and the ‘state’ of integration of newcomers more generally is two-fold or ambiguous (N-B-8). On the one hand, there seems to be an institutionalized support structure in place, involving multiple public and non-public actors in the ‘integration process’. Their tasks range from finding accommodation, to providing social support, and facilitating participation and access to the labor market. On the other hand, – and when asked about the situation regarding the ‘integration of post-2014 migrants’ more generally –, some respondents stated that their integration “has not been successful” or “is not going very well” (N-B-1, N-B-4). Respondents elaborate that the ‘unsuccessful’ or ‘failed’ integration of newcomers becomes apparent in insufficient language skills, a low number of people with paid employment, and – importantly – the ‘fact’ that groups do not ‘mix’. The lack of connections and shared sense of community is further reflected in spatial segregation, resulting from the concentration of refugees in specific neighborhoods which are characterized by “*torenflats*” (residential towers), social housing and a higher share of people with a ‘migration background’ (N-B-1, N-B-3, N-B-4). This, in turn, may lead to alienation of those residents who have lived there longer (N-B-8).

3.2.4 Municipality C (Overijssel, small town)

Municipality C lies in the province Overijssel in the East of the Netherlands and has approximately 50.000 to 80.000 residents. Overall, the local population has slightly grown and become older over the past 10 years (more than 10% increase in grey pressure) (CBS). The city has a relatively high share of residents with a migration background (Strategic Policy Plan Social Domein, 2022): More than 27% of the local population has a ‘migration background’, of which 16% are categorized as ‘non-Western’. The share of foreign residents has increased in the last 10 years by approximately 3% (almost 2% for ‘non-Western’). These numbers are somewhat higher than the national average where almost 25% of the population has a migration background (of which 14% are categorized as ‘non-Western’). In 2020, approximately 500 adult refugees resided in the municipality (Benchmark Divosa, 2020). The local reception center has more than 350 spots for asylum seekers, a number that is sometimes exceeded in exceptional situations, for example in 2015 or in 2021 when the municipality decided to welcome 250 refugees from Afghanistan (newspaper article; N-C-6).

The political orientation of the city has changed significantly since 2014 from rather liberal left /Christian democratic to conservative-right. This clear political shift to the right in the municipal elections in 2018 “shocked” some of the interviewees. Nowadays, respondents describe the city as “*rechts*” (right) (N-C-2, N-C-3, N-C-14) with the majority of seats in the municipal council being held by three conservative(-right) parties. Despite – or because of – this political climate, there are many volunteers who offer their support to refugees as language coaches in the library or during other activities offered by local NGOs (N-C-1, N-C-3, N-C-4, N-C-7, N-C-8, N-C-15).

From a socio-economic perspective, multiple interviewees describe municipality C as a “poor” or “deprived” city with a high share of social welfare benefit recipients (N-C-5, N-C-6, N-C-14): In 2021, almost 70 out of 1000 residents received welfare benefits, compared to the national average of 44 out of 1000 (CBS – Participatiewet, 2021). According to a local official responsible for labor market re-integration, there are at least 1,500 residents with “a very long welfare dependency”, among which refugees account for almost one third (400 -500). The local coalition agreement also states that the city knows “inherited poverty, persistent unemployment, a relatively low-skilled population and a quality of life under pressure” (p. 5).

In spite of its overall weaker socio-economic position, in the past five years the city’s unemployment rate has dropped by more than half (from almost 10% in 2015 to less than 5% in 2020) and the number of job opportunities as well as the number of companies has increased substantially (Knowledge Point of the Region, 2021). The city’s economic landscape is now also shaped by big, international tech as well as large logistic companies and “more than enough jobs” (N-C-6). Interestingly, when comparing the labor market participation of persons with a ‘Dutch’ background to persons with a ‘non-Western migration background’ the gap is smaller in this small town (compared to the other localities): for example, in 2020,

almost 65% of persons with a ‘Dutch’ background were working, compared to 59% of persons with a ‘non-Western migration background’ (in the other localities the difference between the two groups was between 9 and 10%). However, overall, the labor market participation in locality C is significantly lower than in the other two localities (64% for the total population in 2020, compared to almost 73% in locality A and almost 72% in locality B).

The housing market in this small town is characterized by a large share of social housing (especially in older neighborhoods), namely 32%, which is significantly above national average (BZK datawonen, 2020). In its Strategic Policy Plan for 2022, the municipality warns that this larger stock of social housing may increase the likelihood of persons applying for benefits on the basis of the Participation Act (p. 4). This aspect is also mentioned by two representatives of the municipality who expressed concerns that social housing would attract (unemployed) residents from other parts of the country, further increasing the burden on the municipality’s welfare system (N-C-5, N-C-6). Some respondents link the weak economic position to the city’s former labor-intensive textile industry, which heavily relied on migrant labor (N-C-6, N-C-14).

As previously mentioned, more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the city’s population has a migration background. By far the largest group comes from Turkey, followed by Moluccan (former Dutch East-Indies), Iraq, Germany and (since 2021) Poland (CBS). Furthermore, multiple interviewees mention the ‘tight-knit’ Armenian community. According to many respondents, the presence of the rather large Turkish, Armenian and Polish (or “Eastern European”) communities has had an impact on the socio-cultural dynamics in the city as well as the municipality’s approach to integration. Similar to the other cases, the perceived separation between groups and the lack of exchange – especially between migrants and ‘Dutch’ residents – is reflected in the spatial concentration of refugees and migrants in specific neighborhoods (N-C-2, N-C-7_2, N-C-12, N-C-13).

Similar to municipality B, the image that is being drawn is ambiguous – various organizations are involved in integration policy and offer refugees support; yet, respondents still identify many obstacles (language, work, lack of interaction). Moreover, integration appears to be a politically contested topic, or as the local official put it: “in this city, you cannot win elections with the topic of integration.” (N-C-2).

3.2.5 Municipality D (Drenthe, rural area)

Municipality D lies in the sparsely populated province Drenthe in the North-East of the Netherlands and has approximately 20.000 to 40.000 residents. Respondents describe the locality as a small “*plattelandsgemeente*” (rural municipality), comprising one central town and almost 30 surrounding smaller villages (*het buitengebied*).

Less than 9% of the local population has a ‘migration background’, of which less than 4% are categorized as ‘non-Western’. The share of foreign residents has increased in the last 10 years by approximately 1% (almost 2% for ‘non-Western’). These numbers are significantly lower



than the national average where almost 25% of the population has a migration background (of which 14% are categorized as 'non-Western'). Despite the lower share of persons with a 'migration background' among the local population, four out of five respondents indicated in the survey that the municipality has had experience with the arrival and settlement of migrants also before 2014. This may be related to the fact that already in 1995, an asylum seeker center was established in one of the villages (with more than 300 spots). While the municipality is pleased with the reception center, it is not willing to establish a second one, before the other municipalities in the region "have taken their responsibility" (Coalition Agreement 2018, p. 11).

The municipality has for a long time been subjected to a "shrinkage scenario" (N-D-10), that is, the local population has declined over the past 10 years. This trend has only recently been slightly reversed. According to a member of the municipal council, this is also related to people moving from the West of the country to the East where the housing market is (supposedly) less tense. The population of municipality D has aged significantly, with an increase of grey pressure by almost 20% since 2010 (CBS; Policy Plan Social Domain 2017, p. 14).

The locality's political orientation can be described as both conservative and social-democratic. The strongest party in the municipal council is an independent, local party that pays particular attention to the needs of the surrounding villages and neighborhoods (N-D-5). The member of the local government responsible for integration has a social-democratic background. His approach to integration is described by various respondents as 'very social and involved' (N-D-7, N-D-15).

When looking at the economic situation in the municipality, various respondents point out that the rural area is located in an overall poor(er) region ("arme hoek") and refer as an explanation to the region's former "veenkoloniën" (peat colonies) that have shaped the area until today (N-D-10, N-D-14, N-D-15). Traditionally, 'peat villages' (villages located in the peat colonies) are economically not very strong, characterized by a higher unemployment rate, generational poverty and a population with a lower educational background.²⁰ The member of the social advisory board explains the relation between the region's historical economic structure and its difficult economic and demographic situation today:

We are here in the 'peat area' (veengebied). In the past, people worked hard here, 6 days a week for a low wage, mainly manual work. From that generation they still have to deal with the past, with intergenerational unemployment. Parents and grandparents were peat workers and children were poorly educated. This has to do with financial resources and possibilities. [...] In the 'peat area' you notice in terms of mentality: bottle on the table and car in front of the door, that was the most

²⁰ The Rijksuniversiteit Groningen has conducted research on intergenerational poverty in the peat colonies. More information and first results can be found here: <https://uithetmoeras.nl>.

important and the rest was not important. Currently, many are still relatively poorly educated, and employment opportunities are limited; many young people therefore leave for other parts of the country. (Member of the social advisory board)

Importantly, there are inner municipal differences in terms of socio-economic status – not all villages are affected by the developments mentioned above in the same way: “A number of areas in our municipality have a low economic status. These are mainly the areas in [the main city and two villages]. In the rest of the municipality, the socio-economic status is about the same as the average in the Netherlands.” (Policy Plan Social Domain 2017, p. 14). Overall, the municipality has less jobs than the national average and more people with lower educational background (ibid., p. 15). However, the unemployment level is on average lower and there are less social welfare benefit recipients (CBS – Participatiewet, 2021). This was also mentioned by the union representative who describes that the municipality is economically better off than the other municipalities in the region and is therefore facing less problems. The most important economic sectors comprise tourism, agriculture, ‘industry’ as well as SME (small and medium size enterprises) (Coalition Agreement 2018, p. 10).

When comparing the labor market participation of persons with a ‘Dutch’ background to persons with a ‘non-Western migration background’ the gap is significantly bigger, compared to the other localities: for example, in 2020, almost 66% of persons with a ‘Dutch’ background were working, compared to only 49% of persons with a ‘non-Western migration background’ (in the other localities the difference between the two groups was between 9 and 10%). Overall, the labor market participation in locality D is significantly lower than in localities A and B (65% for the total population in 2020, compared to almost 73% in locality A and almost 72% in locality B).

The share of social housing in relation to the total housing stock lies at 21% and is hence significantly lower than the national average and the share in the other localities (BZK datawonen, 2020). Most of the social rental apartments are located in the post-war neighborhoods in the main town and sporadically in some of the smaller villages, leading to a rather segregated housing situation within the municipality: there are currently approximately 180 refugees living in the municipalities who are mainly concentrated in the main town and in



Source: BZK datawonen, 2020



4 to 5 villages (out of almost 30) due to the uneven distribution of social housing within the municipality (N-D-9). Consequently, the situation regarding integration differs significantly per neighborhood (N-D-10; N-D-11).

With regards to the situation of integration in the municipality, it becomes apparent – similar to the other municipalities – that the picture is not as clear cut. On the one hand, respondents highlight several aspects that are going well. Both the local officials and the member of the municipal council underline that the municipality is accommodating *more* refugees than legally required and is therefore ‘ahead’ of its task (N-D-10). Moreover, the collaboration between public, non-public and private actors and the commitment of the municipality are described as positive (N-D-1, N-D-2, N-D-14). On the other hand, respondents also describe forms of resistance in some neighborhoods, the influence of (negative) prejudices and stereotypes and a general lack of familiarity with ‘diversity’ and people from other countries (it is a fairly “white municipality” (N-D-2; N-D-1, N-D-8, N-D-13).

4. Access to housing

4.1 Main challenges / obstacles

When looking at the topic of access to housing in the Netherlands, it is important to mention that access to housing is highly specific for recognized refugees because municipalities have the legal task to find housing for them. Factors that may play a more prominent role in accessing the free housing market (such as national background, (presumed) religious affiliation, or socio-economic/legal status) appear to play a limited role. Yet, negative sentiments towards newcomers among local populations are (sometimes) reflected in the local policy approach taken by municipalities; for example, while in three localities refugees are given priority in accessing housing, locality C has taken a different approach by treating refugees as regular potential tenants and not as a ‘priority group’.

In the context of our research, we did not look at ‘housing careers’ and based on the data collected we can therefore not draw conclusions regarding potential barriers refugees may experience *after* leaving their first allocated housing. For instance, we cannot assess to what extent particular personal backgrounds or practices of racism and discrimination play a role in finding or being denied access to housing on the ‘free market’. The respondents from the housing corporations could also not provide insights on individual housing trajectories because assigned refugees become regular tenants once they start living in the social rental apartment, hence no target-group specific data is collected on a broader scale. As regular tenants they receive support by neighborhood-based social workers employed by the municipality and/or the housing corporation (there is usually no target-group specific support).



From the perspective of the housing corporation representatives, one of the biggest challenges with regards to housing is related to the **particularities of the target group**: they describe that is difficult to find housing for ‘large families’ with more than five or six family members as well as for single men or men arriving by themselves who are waiting for their families to arrive at a later stage. This latter point proves difficult because in these cases the housing corporation needs to find an apartment that is suitable for a family – despite only one person currently living in the Netherlands (and for one person the requirements for housing would be different ones). The respondents working for the local housing corporation in the small town in South Holland explains:

[The biggest challenge] are large families and the single persons, and of course you think a large family is much harder than a single person. It's not, because there are very few small homes available. And, certainly if you're talking about homes for status holders under 22. That's actually not doable, because they have to be in a low-cost home as well, right? ... Now for example we have to pair up only 7 people. But they are seven single status holders. And then it would be even better to pair up a big family of 7. Because yes, there you only need one home and now we have to look for 7 homes of which there are already not so many. We obviously have a lot more 3, 4-bedroom apartments [...]. That's kind of a challenge.

The respondent in the small town in Overijssel similarly mentions:

I really look at the family composition, so then you also depend on which houses are available in which neighborhood. I sometimes have quite large families, which are difficult to place, because we do not have many large houses. We do have homes with 4 bedrooms, but those are not many and that's about it. We have no homes with 5 or 6 bedrooms. So that is sometimes difficult, so they are sometimes linked to another municipality.

Despite all respondents from local housing corporations stating that they try to distribute refugees across the municipality to avoid segregation and to facilitate integration, in practice this is not always feasible because available social housing apartments are often concentrated in particular neighborhoods and not spread across town evenly. Moreover, as illustrated in the quote by the employee of the housing corporation in locality D, migrants themselves may choose to live in neighborhoods where more people ‘with their background’ live:

Many status holders live in [name of a specific neighborhood]. We try to distribute them a bit, but they often don't have a car, so outside of [the main town] is sometimes difficult. And you notice that they go back, and you just notice that they like living together. If they have lived here for two years, they also have the right to another house. Then they often choose this



neighborhood. Earlier there was also a school there, so that was also practical. They like to live close to each other, in the same way we also do.

The employee of the local housing corporation in locality A highlights the same trend and raises the concern that this spatial concentration may affect people's integration:

You want people to integrate, of course, right? So that also means you are going to try to distribute them a little bit across all the neighborhoods, to make sure people do not stick together, but actually dependent a bit on their environment, so that they can integrate a little bit easier. We pay attention to that as much as possible. What is more difficult, if they are alone, for example, they naturally apply to smaller homes, so you usually end up in an apartment, and these [apartments] are, again, in certain neighborhoods, certain parts, so in the end they anyway stay together. So that makes it sometimes difficult indeed, because then of course, integration is suddenly further away. If you have a family, you can easily put them in any residential area, of course. And then it's also much easier to integrate. Anyway, integration with small children is also easy. Children play with each other, go to school with each other, so it all goes much more smoothly. And, of course, that's different if you're here all by yourself, for example. Yes, then you are already a bit on your own and then it is logical that you seek contact with someone with the same background who understands you and your language. And then the integration becomes a bit more difficult.

The concerns raised by the housing corporation employee in locality A, is also reflected in multiple other statements where respondents have argued that a 'lack of mixing' between groups – not only resulting from spatial segregation – is hindering integration because migrants only stay in their 'own community', do not speak the language and do not engage with the local (Dutch) population (N-A-5, N-A-6, N-A-7 & 8, N-A-13, N-A-15; N-B-1, N-B-2; N-B-4; N-B-8; N-C-2, N-C-4, N-C-6; N-D-10):

We're moving towards a more inclusive society and what do I see now emerging regarding the integration issue? Turkish people building their own community, Armenians building their own community and there I think, yes, as a Dutch person I don't just step in there to have a cup of coffee. (Member of local government in locality C)

Respondents across municipalities problematize the **spatial concentration of social housing** in particular neighborhoods not only because it prevents 'mixing' and leads to segregation (N-A-1, N-A-6; N-C-4, N-C-6), but also because it may lead to **tensions between older and newer residents**: "There are sometimes frictions in the local community and you also see certain

segregation with schools that are particularly focused on migrants. While others are only focused on the native Dutch who live here. Well, it is hard to break through that.” (N-A-8)

Moreover, **social housing is often concentrated in old(er), post-war neighborhoods** that are usually characterized by old infrastructure, and a lack of facilities or – to use the words of an employee of a local service provider in locality C: “almost all people who arrived here after 2014 are sitting in disadvantaged districts [...] in buildings where I wouldn't want to be found dead” (N-C-12). Furthermore, in many of these neighborhoods there is a high share of people with lower socio-economic background, with ‘mental problems’, or people affected by homelessness (N-D-11), trends which may be exacerbated by the arrival of refugees who have to deal with their own trauma and arrival process and are often not familiar with local norms and rules: “So then suddenly you have five newcomers with their families in a small street, with their own habits, with their own problems, and their own culture. That clashes! It is the same everywhere. You get a concentration of newcomers in the same place, in the working-class houses.” (N-D-11)

Due to these perceived cultural differences, long-term residents may feel alienated “in their own neighborhood” (N-C-6) and “threatened’ in their ‘ideas of a good life’” (N-D-11). This becomes especially apparent in the rural area in Drenthe where ‘untidy gardens’ and the ‘wrong type of curtains’ have led to complaints of long-term residents towards the municipality (N-D-1, N-D-5, N-D-9, N-D-11, N-D-12, N-D-12). The employee of the local housing corporation stresses the importance of ‘doing something with the garden and the curtains’ because it would also increase the acceptance of newcomers among local residents:

There is some pressure on the housing market now, we also just have other people [in need of housing] who are registered. The regular ones so to speak. The pressure is generally high, but I know that it is worse in the West. But also here ... we also have a waiting time, but it is not significant if you compare that with the West. What I'm saying is, it would be nice if you would do something with the garden and the curtains, in a preventative manner, because that would make things easier, because I do notice that there are prejudices if that is not arranged. And we've pointed that out to the municipality, because they give funding for the interior and (now) they will see what they can do to make it [the curtains] a bit more standard.

As seen in the previous quote, besides these cultural differences, the very **tense housing market and perceived competition** (especially due to aforementioned priority regulation) may lead to resentment among the local population because refugees are seen as ‘skipping’ the long queue for social rental apartments:

You absolutely notice that the pressure is starting to get a little higher. Of course, that's not so strange, given what's going on in the world right now. [...] And you also notice that this has repercussions for ordinary house seekers because they do have the feeling a bit that they are actually left out. So you also start to notice that people find it difficult. On the one hand, people understand and on the other hand, when it comes to their own situation, the understanding sort of decreases. Yes, that's how it works. That is human. (Employee housing corporation, locality A)

The member of the local government in municipality B describes similarly how the perceived competition has over the years also shifted from the labor market to the housing market because of the dramatic situation on the housing market nowadays.

In the past years, what has always played a role – but is now of course much more pronounced – is the housing crisis and that is one of the factors that leaves a significant mark on this whole issue [of integration], right? In 2014, the idea was something more like ‘they're taking our job’ because then after that economic crisis there was still a little more concern regarding employment. And then there was also the concern, ‘they are taking our homes’, but the latter is now totally dramatic because the whole housing market is totally locked in. It's a bit of a fear of foreigners, in particular for Muslims, I think, and the idea that ‘I am not doing so well and because of them (emphasis!) I am doing even worse’.

The **‘overheated’ housing market in the Netherlands** is also more generally seen as providing another difficulty in providing housing for refugees due to the concomitant shortage of social/affordable housing (N-B-2). Interestingly, the employee of the local housing corporation in locality C also mentions that in the past the city was able to meet its target (find housing for the assigned number of refugees) because

In [name of locality] a lot happens via the private market as well. The city has always been able to meet its task very well, because status holders got a house via via – via family and then in the private housing market ... They arrange that themselves and so that's why [name of locality] has always met its goal. But now the number of requests is much higher, much more and now we are also much more in the picture.

Moreover, locality C has significantly more social housing than the other three municipalities (more than 32%); however, the general developments in the Dutch housing market led to concerns that the existing social housing stock would attract (unemployed) residents from other parts of the country, further increasing the burden on the municipality's welfare system (N-C-5, N-C-6).



At the **governance level**, municipalities are required to meet the target set by the national government in order to fulfil their legal tasks which – considering the current housing market – adds additional pressure on the municipalities (N-B-7). Moreover, the current national dispersal mechanism in place makes it difficult for municipalities to connect early on with (potential) refugees assigned to their municipality because refugees are often distributed across the country after receiving their status – and not necessarily in a municipality near the reception center (see also section on national context) (N-D-7, N-D-9).

The perceived **friction or mismatch between reception, allocated housing and integration** is even more pronounced in municipality D because the local asylum seeker center is a so-called '*flex-locatie*'. This means that the '*outflow region*', that is the region recognized refugees are assigned to, changes regularly by 'flexibly' adapting to the situation in municipalities across the country. For example, there are currently less reception centers in South Holland – this is why more asylum seekers have to be 'transferred' from the East of the country towards the West. According to a local employee, being a *flex-locatie* makes it more difficult to establish long-term relations with local actors – because it is often unclear if a refugee can stay in the region (N-D-7).

While the national implementing body COA looks at various factors when assigning the persons and refugees can give a preference with regards to where they would like to stay, the final decision is not always satisfactory from the perspective of both the individual and the municipality. For example, scarce job opportunities for highly skilled migrants in a particular locality or poor public transport in rural areas, may lead to onward migration later on or in the latter case to isolation because people cannot easily move (N-A-4, N-D-5).

At a more **individual level**, language – or rather **the lack of language skills** – is seen throughout interviews and across municipalities as a very big obstacle – not necessarily for access to housing, but more generally for their 'integration' and for the communication with both municipality and housing corporation as well as neighbors (N-A-15, N-D-1).

4.1.1 Interim conclusion

To summarize, across all municipalities various similar challenges are mentioned in the interviews, albeit some challenges were more pronounced in some localities than in others. First, from the perspective of housing corporations finding housing for large families and a high number of single persons was described as particularly challenging because of the conditions of the local housing market (either because there were not many small apartments or – at the other end of the spectrum – not many apartments with 5-6 bedrooms or more). Second, the spatial concentration of social housing in particular neighborhoods makes it difficult to evenly distribute newcomers across the municipality, often leading to a (perceived) segregation between groups. Third, from a societal perspective, this segregation is perceived as problematic and as hindering integration because certain groups would 'only stick together'

and stay in their own communities. Fourth, (perceived) differences in lifestyle and ‘culture’, may lead to tensions within neighborhoods and between new and old residents. This aspect is especially visible in the rural area in Drenthe. Lastly the current housing crisis in the Netherlands proves to be challenging in two main ways: First, municipalities and housing corporations face the challenge of finding affordable housing for refugees amidst an increasing shortage of social housing; a challenge that is further intensified by the growing number of refugees waiting in the reception facilities to get housing in their assigned municipality (see chapter 3.1.1). The municipalities in the East of the country appear to have had less problems with meeting their target in this regard because the local housing markets have been (until recently) less tense than in the West (N-D-1, N-D-10; N-C-9). Second, the tense housing market fueled feelings of competition on the side of local residents who often face difficulties themselves to find affordable housing.

In this context, the representative of the city network G40 emphasizes the interrelatedness of reception, housing and integration and the importance of a stable societal ‘support base’ (*sociaal draagvlak*). She argues that it is important to not only support refugees, but also other ‘vulnerable groups’ who have difficulties finding affordable housing such as students, people experiencing homelessness, divorced parents or persons who are in need of care because “if refugees are prioritized all the time, you won’t have a lot of societal support in the future” (N-G40). And if support in the community is missing or low, it will be difficult to properly organize and regulate the reception or housing of refugees which will ultimately affect their integration in the local community.

4.2 Actors involved

As previously mentioned, the housing of refugees in the Netherlands is a legal task (as defined in the Housing Act 2014), transferring the responsibility to find housing to the municipalities. In order to fulfil this task, **municipalities** have made annual performance agreements with local or regional housing corporations.²¹ The provinces are responsible for the supervision of the task and have the ability to intervene if municipalities recurrently do not meet their target.

Due to the nationally defined legal tasks, the actors involved in the municipalities with regards to access to housing are relatively similar: all four localities have made performance agreements with local or **regional housing corporations** to implement the legal task of finding accommodation for refugees who have been linked to the respective municipality. Municipalities A and C work with two or more housing corporations, while municipalities B

²¹ These annual agreements do not only cover the task of housing refugees, but concern also more broadly policies related to “new construction, investments in sustainability and rent price policy (including rent increases).” Schilder and Scherpenisse (2018) note further that “housing policy is increasingly decentralised, based on the conviction that local differences in housing markets do not automatically fit well with a general, national policy.” (Schilder & Scherpenisse, 2018, p. 3)



and D work (primarily) with one local housing corporation. Interestingly, municipality A also collaborates very closely with the main local non-profit service provider for integration to organize the housing of refugees in the city. Contrary to the other three localities, the local non-profit service provider for integration in municipality A is the one applying for available houses on behalf of the applicant (in this case the refugee) – and not the corporation itself. The employee of the local housing corporation sees this as an advantage because the non-profit service provider knows the persons better and can therefore find more suitable housing for them. She describes the entire process as follows:

We get from the municipality the task, for example, this year we are going to assign 250 persons. We do this together with all the corporations within the municipality. For example, we do half, and the other corporation does half. But it could also be that [name of third corporation], for example, also takes a few. We check, which property is available? Which one is also the most suitable? Everyone does it and we do it through the housing network system, so then we can also precisely say in the end, print reports, to see if we are meeting our goal. We do the advertising [of available apartments] and [name of the main service provider for integration] reacts to it. They know exactly who is looking for what, so to speak. They see the houses in the housing network system, every day there can be a new house on there and then people usually have 3 days to respond. They then respond for the status holders and then they usually get it because the urgency of a status holder is actually always 'above the rest'. The advantage of doing it this way [...] is that [name of the main service provider for integration] is going to respond and they know those people. They have had a conversation with them. Then it becomes a completely different placement because they can then listen better to the wishes that the people have.

Here it is important to mention that in the other three localities, the local service providers for integration do also to some extent collaborate with the housing corporation to find housing for refugees, albeit in a less formalized way. They may provide information on persons or be part of regular meetings to discuss the situation with regards to housing and integration of refugees, but they do not 'respond' (apply) to available housing on behalf of the refugees. The tasks in these three municipalities are more clearly distributed between the different actors, while municipality A has organized most integration-related tasks 'under one roof' (see country report for WP3 for details).

Interestingly, respondents from the housing corporations in the medium size town in the province Utrecht and the rural area in Drenthe describe their roles as going beyond the mere provision of housing. According to the respondents in municipality A, the housing corporation's role is also to "make sure that people are connected and know each other", for example by involving people in a neighborhood BBQ or a 'cleaning action' in spring. According



to the respondent, this is especially important for the topic of integration because “your environment is very important for your integration” (N-A-15). Moreover, the corporation ensures that people can live in a good and cozy (*gezellig*) neighborhood. In municipality D, the respondent notes that the housing corporation also makes sure that refugees understand *how* to live in the local community, for example by helping them pick and hang the ‘right’ curtains; moreover, they facilitate interaction and exchange between new and old tenants (N-D-1).

After the actual placement, several **other actors** come into the picture who mainly provide support at the neighborhood level, such as social advisors (*maatschappelijke consulenten*) or social managers (*sociale beheerders*) of the housing corporations, municipal neighborhood-teams (*wijkteams*), neighborhood officers or staff from local welfare organizations. These actors are not necessarily involved in facilitating access to housing, but focus, for instance, on maintaining and improving the livability in neighborhoods, ensuring the safety of residents, solving arising problems between neighbors or providing necessary information. Importantly, respondents stress that the provided services are available to *all* tenants or neighborhood residents and not just refugees (N-D-1; N-B-3; N-A-15; N-C-13).

The aforementioned challenges related to (access to) housing were mentioned by representatives from housing corporations, municipalities and other non-public actors alike. While employees from the housing corporations provided more detail on issues related to the actual placement procedure (e.g., shortages of social housing, inadequate conditions of local housing market with regards to the characteristic of the target group), other actors highlighted (more) aspects related to the socio-cultural dimension of housing (e.g., tensions among residents in particular neighborhoods, impact of perceived cultural differences).

National, regional, and local governments have taken various steps to address these issues, often collaborating with non-public and private actors operating at different governance levels. The section below provides more detail regarding policies, initiatives, and practices that have been developed and implemented, facilitating – or also hindering – access to housing.

4.3 Policies, initiatives, and practices that foster or hinder access

At the national level, access to housing for refugees is regulated in the national Housing Act (2014) which gives municipalities the responsibility to provide adequate housing for this target group. In principle, access to housing is therefore guaranteed for refugees. Municipalities have the possibility to give refugees a ‘priority treatment’ over other groups eligible for social housing in order to meet their target (which is bi-annually defined by the national government). While three localities (A, B and D) opted to use this priority regulation, municipality C recently decided to treat refugees ‘like any other tenant’ and not as urgent cases. However, with regards to the actual implementation of this municipal decision, the representative of a local housing corporation specifies that they do have some leeway in finding accommodation for refugees:

In principle, the municipality is of the opinion that refugees are regular housing seekers. This is in line with the motion passed by the municipal council. But when housing refugees, it is still possible to make exceptions to this when prompt housing is important. And we can also provide tailor-made solutions for exceptional cases, at the discretion of the housing corporations. All this means that there are still plenty of opportunities to assign an accommodation to them as a priority in addition to the regular housing allocation for refugees.

In contrast to municipality C, the local official responsible for housing in locality A stresses that it is not mandatory to treat refugees as a group with a particular ‘urgency’, but the municipality has made the conscious decision to do it anyway (similar to localities B and D):

Nowadays it is actually the case that you are not obliged to say that refugees are given an urgency status. With us, they get 3 months of urgency. We have still included this in the housing regulation. That obligation was once removed and that has to do with national policy or the Housing Act. Nevertheless, you have to meet that target. So, [the politicians] translated it at the time into ‘we think it is important to just give that urgency’.

As previously shown, – and despite making housing for refugees a legal obligation – there are various challenges when it comes to practically facilitating housing; challenges to which national, regional, and local governments have responded in different ways. To decrease some of the pressure on the reception facilities which were struggling to accommodate both newly arrived asylum seekers and recognized refugees, the national government implemented a new **‘hotel and accommodation regulation’** (*hotel- en accommodatieregeling*) (N-JenV_2). The hotel and accommodation regulation (HAR) allows municipalities to offer refugees who have been linked to the municipality temporary accommodation for up to six months (for example, in local hotels). Moreover, via the national *logeerregeling* (lodging arrangement) refugees receive the opportunity to stay with a host family for three months (instead of waiting in the reception center for more permanent housing). Here, the national implementing body COA works together with the non-profit foundation Takecarebnb.

Local governments can further arrange **other forms of temporary housing** (container, former office spaces etc.) to bridge the time until more permanent housing is found in the municipality (N-O, N-SH). These flexible, temporary housing arrangements are measures taken to address the current shortage of social housing and the concomitant difficulties in providing housing for refugees in the legally defined time span of 10 weeks. One concrete example of a local initiative facilitating access to temporary housing is a ‘mixed housing project’ in municipality A where various target groups live together, including first-time renters, but also former unaccompanied minors and other groups that fall under ‘youth care’. The young people living in the ‘mixed community’ are supported by employees of two local housing

corporations and joint activities between residents are encouraged.²² Municipality A has also started converting a former office building into living spaces in which refugees, people affected by homelessness and long-term home seekers will live together. In their 'housing visions', municipalities B and C suggest similar plans to address the housing of refugees (and labor migrants), namely through the transformation of vacant offices, the use of undeveloped plots, and regional cooperation (Locality B: Woonvisie 2015, 32; Locality C: Woonvisie 2020, 24).

A more permanent, long-term solution is the **construction of new social and affordable housing** in the locality. Municipality A, for instance, makes sure that "with any new construction development, a minimum of 35% social housing must be built, thus, we set the requirements" (N-A-14). More generally, the 'housing visions' in the four localities pay attention to the needs of 'vulnerable' or 'special' groups (for example, with lower income), with a reference to refugees and/or labor migrations as being part of this group that requires particular attention.

Local governments have also tried finding ways to **respond to spatial segregation and growing tensions** in particular neighborhoods, for instance through local housing policies. The member of the local government in locality D emphasizes that the new 'housing vision' aims at improving the distribution of newcomers across the locality to avoid spatial segregation and alleviate some of the pressure on specific neighborhoods. In this way, people are also 'prevented' from only living in their own community. The municipality thus moves from 'target group placement' to a more generic distribution across the entire municipality (N-D-11, N-D-5). The municipality further seeks to involve residents who have expressed concerns regarding the settlement of refugees by organizing a "talk in the neighborhood" (N-D-9). Finally, the local housing corporation has published a brochure, explaining some of the important rules on 'how to live' in the Netherlands (for instance, with regards to hanging the 'right' type of curtains, following the 'correct' ventilation habits and keeping the garden tidy). In 2015, representatives of the local government in municipality A have similarly sought the dialogue with residents who were 'worried' about the arrival of asylum seekers in their neighborhood.

Besides developing certain policies and initiatives with regards to housing, municipalities regularly meet with other local or regional actors to discuss the issue, most importantly with housing corporations, but also with the local non-profit service providers for integration that support refugees with their administrative tasks. Moreover, municipalities regularly meet with representatives from the provinces to think together about possible solutions (N-O, N-SH).

²² The report is primarily based on interviews conducted with stakeholders at various governance levels and with different functions in the municipality. The findings are structured along the main points that were raised during these interviews and that were deemed important by the respondents. Importantly, similar structures (such as regional collaboration networks) or projects (such as alternative mixed-housing projects) may be in place in other localities as well but were either not mentioned in the interviews or the respective stakeholder was not available for an interview.

Housing corporations are sometimes in contact with other neighboring municipalities, for example if it proves very difficult to impossible to accommodate a big family (mentioned in locality B and C).

4.4 Specific target groups

In the Netherlands, access to housing for refugees is highly specific, that is, there is a targeted policy that ‘guarantees’ housing for them once they receive their residence permit and are linked to a municipality. After their allocation, they are treated like ‘normal’ tenants. This means that if they want to change their location and/or apartment, they may have to wait a substantial amount of time before being assigned a new house (N-A-15).

Importantly, the situation looks very differently for labor migrants from EU Member States (primarily Poland, Bulgaria, and Rumania) whose stay is often assumed as being only temporary. They are in many cases hired to meet the labor market demand in the agricultural or logistics sector, but housing is not provided. A trade union representative pointedly summarizes:

Migrants have nowhere to live because the housing market is getting pretty tight. Municipalities who have the permission to bring in some big companies or build logistics warehouses for example, they don't know what consequences that has for housing. [...] They don't have enough people to do that work, so somebody has to come [from abroad], that means they have to live somewhere. That's a whole chain reaction. [...] They think ‘hey, how can we make money? Yeah, by bringing in the big companies!’ [...] And that is actually the crux of the matter. The question is when the Netherlands brings in all that low-paid work for all those big companies, do we indeed have the infrastructure to take care of them?

Access to housing can be similarly difficult for other ‘migrant’ groups who do not fall under the housing regulation and/or any other priority regulation due to the tense housing market and (possibly) other factors such as discrimination. The current regulation targeting recognized refugees is therefore highly selective, channeling this particular group into the social housing system, while excluding others’ who enter the Netherlands via different (legal) pathways and consequently have a different status. The role of a person’s legal status and its in-/exclusionary effects will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

The main findings are summarized in the table below:



CASE	Major obstacle(s)	Actor(s) involved	Measure(s)	Target group(s)
Municipality A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing crisis - Spatial segregation - Concerns among local population (due to priority regulation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipality - Local housing corporations - Main non-profit service provider for integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local housing policy (with requirements about social housing stock) - Mixed housing projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refugees (recognized)
Municipality B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing crisis - Spatial segregation - Concerns among local population (due to priority regulation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipality - Local housing corporations 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refugees (recognized)
Municipality C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing crisis - Spatial segregation - Concerns among local population (due to priority regulation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipality - Local housing corporations 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refugees (recognized)
Municipality D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spatial segregation - Concerns among local population (due to priority regulation) - Tensions in neighborhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipality - Local housing corporations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing vision 'Neighborhood talk' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refugees (recognized)

Table 4: Case-by-case summary of results/findings regarding the area of housing

5. Access to employment

5.1 Main challenges / obstacles

In all four municipalities, the share of the employed labor force in the population with a ‘non-Western migration background’ is substantially lower compared to persons with a ‘Dutch background’ (CBS, 2022). This gap has in most municipalities decreased over the past 15 years; albeit to varying degrees. In locality C, for example, the gap is the smallest (with less than 7% difference), while in locality D, there is a difference of 17% with regards to the share of the employed labor force in the population of ‘non-Western migrants’ compared to persons with a Dutch background (see for a differentiated account per locality chapter 3.2). Moreover, persons with a migration background (including refugees, but also second and third generation immigrants) are often employed part time and/or under temporary contracts (CPB/SCP 2020).

Respondents across all localities mention similar challenges and obstacles with regards to the labor market integration of post-2014 migrants, with a focus on refugees. Obstacles were identified at various levels, including individual, economic, policy and governance, and societal levels. Importantly, these levels are connected to each other, for example, the lack of language skills (individual level) may be related to poor quality and availability of language classes in the locality and limited provision of social support under the old Civic Integration Act (policy level).

5.1.1 Individual level

First, at the **individual level**, almost all respondents across municipalities describe **language** as *the* key to integration because language skills are crucial to find work, communicate with others and learn more about the Netherlands. Or in other words, language is “as important as eating and drinking and breathing” (N-A-2). Conversely, a lack of or ‘insufficient’ language skills were seen as (one of) *the* major obstacle(s) with regards to labor market access because it has proven to be very difficult to find paid employment if a person does not have a good command of the Dutch (professional) language (N-A-1, N-A-3, N-A-4, N-A-5, N-A-7 & 8, N-A-11; N-B-6, N-B-11; N-C-7_2; N-C-15; N-D-4, N-D-12, N-D-13, N-D-7). A local employer (cleaning company) in locality B explains how language – or rather the lack thereof – can act as a barrier in finding a (qualified) job, especially when intersecting with a presumed lack of credibility on the employer’s side:

Just a simple example, a Syrian man is working with us who was in Syria an account manager at a big car company. Yeah, that's never going to happen here, of course, that he is immediately going to start working here as an account manager at Toyota or something like that. That's almost impossible. One, because his diploma is obviously not valid here. Two, because there's a

huge language barrier where you have to keep talking to each other and trying to explain and translate and sometimes even get someone in to translate into Arabic. And with us it's not so bad then because you don't need a computer or anything like that. You're just interacting one on one. But yeah, everyone has their own story, and everyone has their own background and experience in terms of work. Of course, it is difficult for them to start again somewhere. Yes, you notice that this is often the first step. ... I think if he were to knock on the door of an accountant that they would say 'anyone could say that [they are an accountant]', there is little credibility in that respect and because you do not speak the language well, you are often already two points behind because you cannot understand each other.

What people are confronted with here is a paradox because language is seen as an obstacle to find employment, but having employment is described as crucial in helping people to learn the language.

Besides this 'language deficit' (N-A-5), **unrecognized work experience and educational qualification** thus are seen as another challenge in finding paid employment, two aspects that can negatively reinforce each other. That is, if a person's diploma is not recognized and they also do not speak the language very well, it proves difficult to communicate confidently and credibly to an employer that said qualification and experience were acquired in the country of origin. Especially because applications are often seen "through a Dutch lens" (N-A-3) and are therefore assessed based on the requested requirements (such as sufficient language skills and a recognized diploma).

This observation relates more generally to a person's **personal background** and its influence on accessing employment. A respondent from the trade union in the province Drenthe states:

I think the situation differs significantly depending on people's backgrounds, whether you are dealing with European migration flows or with people who have a refugee background and have been in AZCs [asylum seekers centers] for quite some time. There is a big difference compared to people who come here and actually already have jobs and are well educated.

Throughout the interviews, respondents similarly highlight that education – and especially the **level of education** – plays a crucial role in determining a person's 'integrability' and 'employability'. That is, there is a "big difference between low- and high- educated refugees" (N-C-7_2) regarding their chances to find paid employment (N-A-3, N-A-7 & 8; N-B-6; N-D-5).

Consequently, a main difference between groups is often made along the lines of **socio-economic status**; yet a person's educational and professional background as factor influencing the (labor market) integration in the localities, may play out less straight forward than expected. On the one hand, it appears to be easier for well-educated people with a school or

university degree, and some professional experience, to integrate because they learn the language easier, often speak English and have a clearer idea of where they would like to work. On the other hand, they may find it harder to find a job that actually corresponds with their education and skills because refugees often find jobs – or are assigned to jobs – in the low-skilled sector where language skills are less needed and where there is a high demand for labor (N-B-6). This, in turn, is very often seen as undesirable from the perspective of the respective person who experiences this potential **socio-economic downward mobility** as something negative (this aspect was also mentioned by multiple post-2014 migrants that were interviewed for WP5). They may consequently sometimes refuse to start working in such jobs, eventually finding employment later than those accepting jobs in the low-skilled sector.

Interestingly, the socio-economic argument (the argument with regards to a person's education background) is often linked to specific **countries of origin**: refugees from Syria and Iraq were described as rather 'well-educated', while refugees from countries such as Eritrea or Somalia were often associated with having a lower educational background and coming from less developed, rural areas (N-A-3; N-C-5; N-D-5). One respondent in locality B explains that a lot of Eritreans worked for a family company and thus have practical skills, but no actual *evidence* of their work experience and qualification (N-B-12).

Some respondents also mention **potential cultural differences** related to a person's (ethnic) background as a challenge, but less with regards to finding employment and more related to the actual performance on the job because people are "unfamiliar with the Dutch working culture" (N-A-11; N-B-6; N-C-5, N-C-11).

Moreover, respondents across municipalities emphasize that **age** is a major factor in determining a person's (labor market) integration trajectory (N-A-7 & 8; N-A-13; N-C-10; N-C-2; N-C-5). Usually, younger refugees integrate much easier because they learn the language quicker and may have the opportunity to learn another profession (N-C-7_2). Conversely, multiple respondents mention that it is more difficult for people who are older than 30 years old to continue their education because they are usually not eligible for financial support provided by the national implementing body DUO (N-B-12).²³ Another factor, that may also intersect with age, is a person's **gender** and often related to that their family situation. Generally speaking, it appears to be more difficult and takes longer for women to find full-

²³ DUO stands for *Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs* (literally: Education Executive Service). DUO is a national agency/implementing body which executes educational laws and regulations on behalf of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. DUO also implements the Civic Integration Act on behalf of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (<https://duo.nl/organisatie/organisatie/>). Refugees who are between 18 and 30 years old and are following a course (*opleiding*) or are about to start one can usually apply for a financial contribution or a student grant from DUO. Refugees who are between 30 and 56 years old may be eligible, but the requirements are more difficult to meet (see: <https://forrefugees.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/nl/onderwijsa> and <https://duo.nl/particulier/studiefinanciering/voorwaarden.jsp>).

time employment quickly, especially when women are taking care of their children as well (N-A-3; N-C-5; N-B-6). A local official in locality C explains that this may also differ per country:

In some countries you see that people, also the women, make big jumps and that differs again per ethnicity. So, from Syria you do have families where the woman also worked in the country of origin. And you also have families whose ethnicity is different, where that's not the case, so it depends on many factors, not just the country of origin, but also on the ethnicity, on the religion. Yes, because of that it sometimes takes some extra attention to work with that as well. ... what you often see is that sometimes people didn't go to school at all, right? Especially women who were not allowed to go to school at all, because their family system is like that. And, of course, that says nothing about their ability to learn. It does say something about the time they need to be able to develop, because if you never went to school and you already have a family and children, then it just takes more time.

Finally, refugees' **mental health** may also play a role in their ability to learn the language and subsequently find paid employment (N-A-2). The coordinator of a local language café in the medium size town in the province Utrecht (locality A) describes her observations as follows:

For refugees, they have the baggage from their escape, from the war in the country that they came from and that eternal fear for the family that is still there and is in constant danger. And a lot of their family is no longer, for example, in Syria, but is somewhere along the way in Greece in a camp and that makes the position of refugees much more vulnerable. They just have so many concerns that in their head, sometimes the language can't quite fit in anymore, especially if you're a little bit older, then of course it's harder to learn the language anyway. And then you see that there's not enough room in the head, there's too much stress.

5.1.2 Macro-economic level

Besides factors at the individual level (language and personal background), respondents across all four municipalities identify certain challenges at the **economic, labor-market related level**. First, **employers themselves may be hesitant to hire refugees** because they may have to invest a lot of work and time to support a refugee, especially regarding language learning, but also in other aspects such as filling in documents or helping them to manage their finances (N-A-3, N-A-10, N-A-11; N-C-11). Looking at the **limited job opportunities** in locality D, the representative of the Dutch Council for Refugees argues that it would be desirable if more companies were willing to offer refugees a job or internship – also because having employment is beneficial for the improvement of language skills:

It would be very nice if more employers offered work placements or jobs. I don't think this is just the case in [name of locality], by the way, but so that people can really get to know the work environment, and also the language on the work floor. People speak Drents [local dialect] here, so that's a real challenge. So, finding a job is a real challenge, or being offered an internship or a trial day where employer and status holder could get to know each other. [...] I have the idea that the municipality is working very hard, but also sees fewer results than they actually want. So, there are a few employers who really do regularly employ people or offer internships. The best thing would be if you could just give everyone a place [to work] where they could practice the language.

Job opportunities thus depend on the **willingness of employers to hire refugees**, but also on the **specificities of local labor market structures**. For example, according to the respondent of the service provider for labor market (re-)integration in municipality B it is more difficult for highly-skilled migrants to find a job because there are no bigger international tech-companies in the locality (N-B-6). It appears easier to find a job in the low-skilled sector due to the dominance of the agricultural/flower industry in the area. With regards to the hesitance of some employers to hire refugees (with low language skills), a local official in municipality C mentions that the increasing shortage of labor in many sectors is 'forcing' employers to be more open to hiring new target groups (N-C-5). The impact of broader labor market-related and demographic developments is also mentioned by other respondents across governance levels, for instance by the respondent from the Ministry of Justice and Security who states that reports from the national demographic research institute NIDI and Statistics Netherlands (CBS) make clear that due to the demographic development, the Dutch economy will to some extent be dependent on migrants to fill the labor market demands in the future (N-JenV_1).

A second challenge is what could be described as the '**voluntary/unpaid work trap**'. On the one hand, volunteering is seen as a first step towards full-time paid employment and referred to as beneficial in terms of gaining work-related experience, getting accustomed with the 'Dutch (working) culture', improving language skills, and meeting people from other backgrounds. On the other hand, people may also find themselves 'trapped' in the voluntary sector, for example because they themselves feel comfortable (enough) there and are not able to find a *paid* job in a similar position, but only in less attractive fields, such as cleaning companies or logistics (N-C-10). A local official in locality C highlights this aspect:

With volunteering, what you see a lot, is that women often get stuck in the voluntary work. They like it very much and that they are also very much wanted there, right? For example, women in schools. But they are not offered the opportunity to develop further. That's a pity, so if you do voluntary work, you have to be careful with that too, because the women are very happy with what they do in the voluntary work. They like it very



much at such a school. And then it is difficult to convince them that paid work is even better. Because the type of paid work [that is offered to them], they like less, because what we then offer these women is actually cleaning or factory work. Yes, then of course it's much more fun at school, because then you are also valued and that makes you happy.

People do not only get 'trapped' in voluntary/unpaid work because of less attractive paid jobs, but also because employers are not necessarily willing to pay equal salary – or any salary – for the (same) work that the person has already done voluntarily. Multiple post-2014 migrants explained that employers gladly accept that they are doing voluntary work [language did not seem to be a problem], but if they ask for more, they are being told that they cannot get paid for the (same) job because of a lack of diploma or language skills (respondent from Guinea in locality C; also mentioned by other respondents in locality A and B).²⁴ Moreover, sometimes refugees start (on paper) an internship at a company, while still receiving their social welfare benefits. However, in practice they often work full-time and over longer periods of time for one employer, doing the work for 'free' that other people could get paid for. This development is problematic in two ways: First, refugees are working full-time, but are not actually independent of welfare benefits and cannot, for instance, start paying into their pension fund. Second, other potential workers are being displaced because instead of hiring them, the employer opts to hire a refugee 'for free'. The representative of the regional trade union office in Overijssel explains this dynamic which may lead to unfair competition at the 'onderkant' (bottom) of the labor market (N-C-14, also mentioned by N-C-7).

We do see abuses more often [...] There are also people who do a job for free, so while retaining their benefits, leading to 'displacement' of ordinary work on the labor market. That means that the 'native' workers don't like that very much and it leads to envy. [...] We are very much for equal work, equal pay If your work is really an internship and you are also developing, ... then it's fine that you can do that with the retention of your benefits. But I think that if you just work, even if you just do production work, for example, ... people should also just get paid and then also get it like everyone else.

The trade union representative further argues that refugees are more generally prone to ending up in **precarious working conditions** and being exploited, due to their vulnerable position (also mentioned by the union representative of the regional office in Drenthe). Their vulnerability is influenced by various factors such as potential trauma, lack of familiarity with the new context, little knowledge regarding their rights, and external ignorance towards their skills and talents (N-C-14).

²⁴ Multiple post-2014 migrants living in the four localities were interviewed for Work Package 5 of the Whole-COMM project. Their experiences will be discussed in more depth in the WP5 country report for the Netherlands.

The third challenge that respondents identify with regards to accessing employment for post-2014 migrants/refugees, was the *type* of work most refugees find. Self-evidently, not all refugees end up in the ‘voluntary/unpaid work trap’. However, as previously mentioned, they often find **temporary jobs in low-skilled sectors** such as logistics, agriculture, or cleaning, not considering their interests, talents and experiences (N-A-12, N-B-6, N-C-2, N-C-7, N-C-14):

Very often you see that people are actually taken by the hand, they are taken by the arm and, yes, they have to integrate, but this usually means ‘go to work, because then you also immediately learn the language’. There is nothing wrong with that. But people are not really given attention, their talents are not considered. And then we often see status holders who are actually putting rings in boxes for years, while they might be academically trained people. They're never asked, they're never actually asked. The thinking is that this is a refugee and therefore they should work. (Trade union representative in Overijssel)

Importantly, this aspect was more pronounced in some localities than in others. In locality C, for instance, it was mentioned by various respondents that a large number of refugees works in big factories in the production or in logistics (N-C-7, N-C-15). The municipality collaborates here closely with temporary employment agencies which place refugees temporarily (often for only six months) in these jobs which are usually monotonous but labor-intensive (also mentioned by migrants themselves). In locality B, many refugees had to start working in cleaning companies or in the agricultural sector, more specifically “in the flower fields” (N-B-12; N-B-6, N-B-11, also mentioned by migrants themselves).

5.1.3 Policy and governance level

This latter point is very closely related to the **policy and governance level** which influences the access to employment for post-2014 migrants. From a policy perspective, various respondents stated that the national **Participation Act** plays a major role here. The respondent of the service provider supporting people with their re-integration into the labor market in locality B explains that – according to the law – “people should be self-reliant” (N-B-6) and start working as fast as possible. This is why, as described above, many refugees are initially ‘channeled’ into jobs in the unskilled or low-skilled segment of the labor market – because here language skills and diplomas appear to be less important, and people can start sooner. While starting work early is seen by some as beneficial for the integration process more generally – because people are supposedly exposed to a ‘Dutch’ environment – many low skilled jobs do actually not have this ‘promising’ effect of exposing refugees to the Dutch language because many jobs in these sectors are typically done by other migrants (N-C-14).

Moreover, multiple respondents across municipalities stress that being ‘pushed’ to work in these types of jobs is often at odds with the aspirations of persons who want to continue their study and/or find work in a job that corresponds with their professional and educational background – especially for those highly educated (N-B-6, N-B-12, N-C-7, N-C-10, N-C-10). The **pressure to be self-reliant as soon as possible** through paid employment, leaves people little choice or control over their own trajectory and consequently also little room for self-development (N-B-9, N-C-7). While refugees thus receive support from the municipality to find work, the type of work does not always meet their own needs and aspirations. They are excluded from certain sectors of the labor market, showing that dynamics of in- and exclusion can also be layered. That is, they are included in the labor market – but only in particular sectors of it.

This strict “work-first” approach is according to some respondents a characteristic of locality’s C approach to migrant integration where from a municipal perspective ‘successful’ integration is primarily defined in economic terms and understood as ‘self-sufficiency’ (see also WP3 country report). Here, people receiving welfare benefits are obliged to do voluntary work and may face a reduction in benefits if they fail to meet this obligation. Conversely, in locality D respondents state that they have never heard of someone having their benefit reduced or cut. Municipalities thus also have some leeway in the implementation of the Participation Act.

Besides the Participation Act, some respondents explain that the overall general ‘integration system’ in place may pose a challenge to refugees finding employment, as this quote from the former chair of the local employer association in locality B illustrates:

I know a lot of employers who stand with open arms, besides the economic aspect, just the human aspect, they stand with open arms, they're willing to free up places for people to integrate, to participate, to see where their opportunities are. So, there are many opportunities, but the ‘refugee industry’ won’t let them go.

According to him, people themselves would like to work, but are not given the chance because the system in place acts as a hindrance, signaling to people ‘you are not allowed to work’: “If you don't have status or whatever, all you do is wait, you are not allowed to work, not allowed. Instead, they have to learn how to bake a pancake, how to organize a Dutch *feestje*’ (party) because this is defined as integration.” (N-B-9)

The respondent’s argument reflects a broader paradigm clash between ‘integration first’ or ‘work first’ which is also described above by the representative of the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG). She refers to it as a dilemma that local officials are sometimes confronted with when deciding if the possibility of having a paid job, regardless of what type, trumps the importance of having a job that allows for enough time to learn the language.

The representative of a local advisory board in the rural area in Drenthe similarly argues that refugees are often “not allowed to do anything” (N-D-14), and may therefore possibly start working irregularly:

If at a certain point you are indeed in an AZC [asylum seeker center] [...] and waiting for your status, well, for one, this of course causes a lot of headaches and trouble and tension for the people. And two, if they also have to sit at home all day and are not allowed to do anything, well that only frustrates. Then at some point you regularly see refugees from the ACZ or elsewhere simply go and work in the black economy. Well, in itself this is fine for integration, because then they quickly learn the customs in the Netherlands, but of course this is not the way to go. I think the national government should create more opportunities to keep these people busy.

Hence, the rules and procedures in place may act as an obstacle to (labor market) integration and may also lead to frustration among migrants (N-A-5).

Finally, respondents referred to two more policy level factors that pose a challenge to finding employment: First, the difficult and lengthy process of having foreign **diplomas recognized** (N-A-7 & 8, N-A-3, N-C-7 & others); second, the local opportunity structure, for instance, the limited availability and flexibility of language course providers (N-B-6) and the (poor) responsiveness of service providers facilitating labor market access (N-A-3; N-C-15).

5.1.4 Societal level

At the societal level, some respondents mention that refugees experience **discrimination** due to certain prejudices and stereotypes (N-A-5, N-C-7; N-CNV; N-FNV_1, N-FNV_2). According to a respondent from a national NGO in locality C, discrimination can play out in two main ways: First, migrants often face discrimination when applying for jobs; second, migrants are also subjected to discrimination within organizations, preventing them from social and economic growth and mobility towards a better position (N-C-8). Moreover, people may also be excluded in the workplace, resulting in feelings of isolation and frustration. Interestingly, discrimination was more often mentioned by respondents at the national level (for instance, by trade union representatives) and less by local respondents. Some respondents refer to the potentially negative influence of certain stereotypes but did not specifically use the word “discrimination”. This term was only used sporadically by a few respondents from local NGOs/service providers. This does, however, not mean that refugees were not affected by discrimination or racism when accessing the labor market.

5.1.5 Interim conclusion

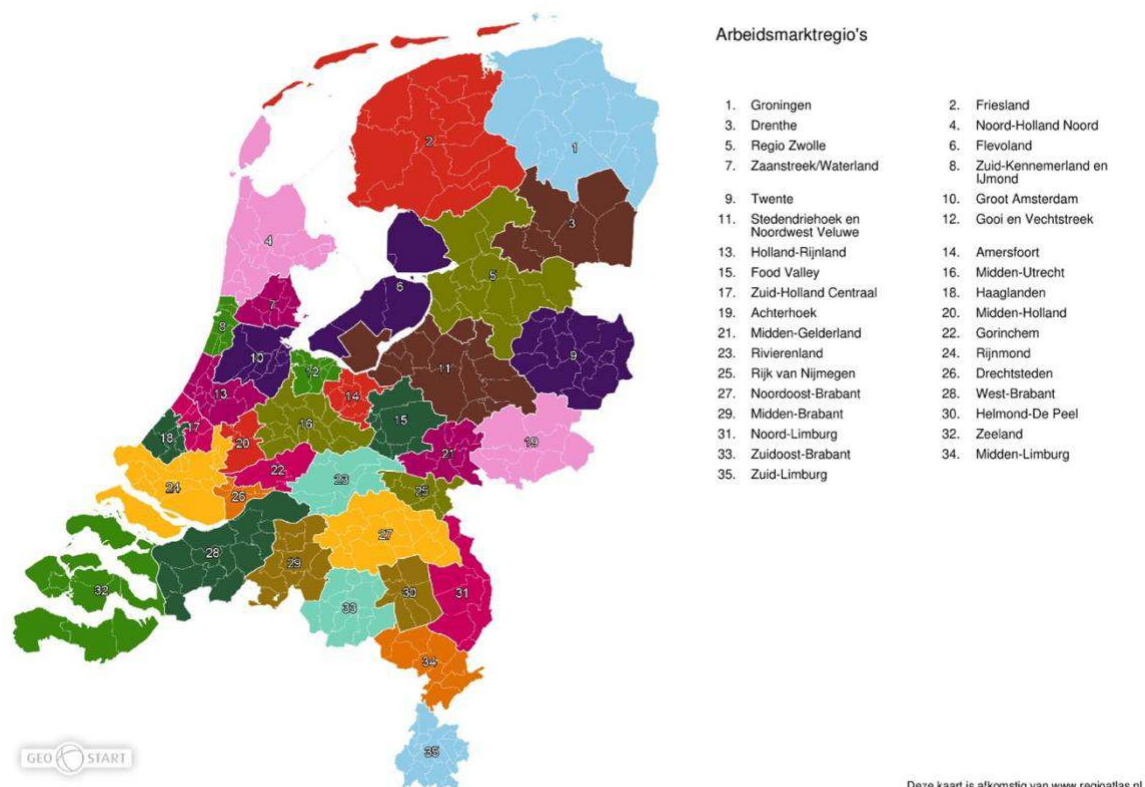
To summarize, respondents across all localities identify various challenges and obstacles with regards to the labor market integration of post-2014 migrants, with a focus on refugees. These challenges and obstacles were related to various levels, namely individual, economic, policy and governance, and societal levels. First, the individual level refers to a person's (lack of) language skills which are described as crucial to finding employment, as well as a person's personal background. Here, we see that factors such as educational background, ethnicity, age, gender, and mental health influence a person's chances of finding employment in various, often intersecting ways. Second, at the economic level, employers' willingness and openness to hire refugees, the 'voluntary work trap' as well as precarious working conditions play another role in determining a person's economic trajectory and mobility. Third, at the policy and governance level, it becomes apparent that under the national Participation Act, refugees are often channeled into the low-skilled sector of the labor market, without considering their personal background and aspirations. Moreover, the 'integration system' in place may act as a hindrance when refugees are 'kept waiting'. Finally, at the societal level, discrimination against refugees – but also labor migrants – has a negative influence on people's chances to find long-term sustainable employment under fair working conditions.

5.2 Actors involved

The Netherlands is divided into 35 'labor market regions.' Every region has a public WerkgeversServicepunt (WSP) ('Employers Service Point'), a collaboration of municipalities, the UWV (Employee Insurance Agency)²⁵, educational institutions, knowledge centers and other parties. The overall goal of the WSP is to help jobseekers who are not immediately employable, such as welfare recipients, older unemployed persons, jobseekers with a disability and – importantly – refugees, to find work more quickly. Employees can therefore receive professional guidance and support from job coaches (such as a personal training program) and employers can ask for guidance on how to 'utilize' the employee's talents. Moreover, employers who hire someone with an illness or disability who is unable to earn the minimum wage can apply for a wage subsidy.²⁶

²⁵ The "UWV (Employee Insurance Agency) is an autonomous administrative authority (ZBO) and is commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) to implement employee insurances and provide labor market and data services." (see for more information: <https://www.uwv.nl/overuwv/english/about-us-executive-board-organization/detail/about-us>).

²⁶ See for more information the website of the *Programmaraad Regionale Arbeidsmarkt* and the UWV: <https://www.samenvoordeklant.nl/werkgeversservicepunten>; <https://www.werk.nl/werkgevers/wervingsadvies/werkgeversservicepunt/?friendlyurl=/werkgeversservicepunt>.



In all four localities the regional WSP is part of the structures in place to support recognized refugees with their labor market integration; yet, the role of the WSP differs per locality.

In the **medium size town in the province Utrecht (locality A)**, the main local non-profit service provider for integration which supports refugees during their civic integration trajectory also provides in-house language courses as well as assistance with labor market integration (besides helping refugees to find housing, as was mentioned in the section above). One of the main goals of the non-profit service provider for integration is to connect refugees and employers, thereby facilitating access to work, as well as participation because “economic self-sufficiency appears to form the best basis for integration” (website). Importantly, there is one employee who specifically focuses on labor market integration, working closely with the regional WSP/the municipality and employers. The employee explains: “I work with the employer service point. Because I work with the municipality, every employer I visit I have to verify with them, I'm not allowed to just visit employers. I have to check with the municipality first. Who is the contact person [for the refugee]? Do you mind if I contact them?”

Next to the non-profit service provider for integration, there was until recently also a national social corporation with a focus on labor market integration that matched newcomers with local employers or organizations for a traineeship (N-A-3). The social corporation offered customized support by looking closely at a person's educational and professional background



to find the right type of traineeship. Besides the main non-public service provider for integration, the social corporation was the only organization in municipality A focusing on labor market integration for refugees (N-A-3).

In the **small town in South Holland (locality B)**, a regional (semi-public) service provider helps refugees with finding employment. The service provider is part of the regional WSP. Consequently, the service provider offers its support to all residents who receive welfare benefits and/or have a 'distance to the labor market'. Since refugees are (in most cases) part of this target group, they are sent via the municipal administration to the regional service provider in order to be re-integrated into the labor market (N-B-2, N-B-6). The role of the service provider can be described as two-fold: first, it connects people with employers through their 'strong' employer network. Second, as 'development company' it promotes the development of people, for instance by letting people participate in a "*werkfit programma*" or in other trainings (application workshop or security trainings) – sometimes in collaboration with schools or other educational facilities (N-B-6).

On the topic of labor market (re-)integration, the **small town in Overijssel (locality C)** collaborates closely with other municipalities and the UWV in the regional WSP. The goal is to help social welfare benefit recipients, including refugees, to find a suitable job. Moreover, the service point supports employers by providing information about how to apply for subsidies, organizing trainings on intercultural communication or sending in a job coach who speaks the language of the refugee (N-C-5). Moreover, every refugee has a 'work coach' as contact point in the municipality to discuss and plan next steps with regards to labor market integration.

Slightly different from the other three municipalities, **the rural area in Drenthe (locality D)** decided to organize the task of labor market integration primarily 'in-house' through the role of *klantmanagers* who specifically focus on facilitating refugees' access to the labor market (N-D-9_1, N-D-9_2). This in-house approach was a conscious choice to create 'short lines', because "within the municipal administration you can just walk to each other" (N-D-9_2). This in-house approach stands, for instance, in contrast to municipality B where most of the tasks, including labor market integration, are outsourced to different providers. In municipality D, the regional WSP appears to play a marginal role (compared to the other localities B and C).

At the regional level, municipality D and two neighboring municipalities have entered a partnership in which the three municipalities exchange information and work together on topics related to the social domain, in particular the implementation of the Participation Act (N-D-5). At the level of the 'labor market region', there is a regular, structural meeting between municipalities of the respective region and various labor market actors such as employers, the union's regional office, the Employee Insurance Agency, and educational institutions, discussing and developing policies regarding labor market, but not with a specific focus on integration of migrants (N-D-15) (this also applies similarly to locality C).



Importantly, in all four localities, there are various **non-public organizations and voluntary initiatives** that provide services related to language learning or ‘self-development’, ultimately (indirectly) contributing to fostering access to (paid) employment. In locality C, for instance, the local non-profit service provider for integration offers extra language support for refugees with the help of more than 30 volunteers. In all four localities, **local libraries** offer additional language support through individual coaching or language classes. The role of the library as additional support structure appears particularly prominent in locality B. National NGOs such as Humanitas have initiated additional activities or projects for migrants (localities C and D).

Besides municipalities and their collaboration partners, **employers** are also considered important actors that may hinder or facilitate access to employment. However, according to the local employers that were interviewed as part of this research, there were almost no structural forms of collaboration in place (with municipalities or other organizations). Two representatives of a local employer association in municipality A mention that the topic of refugee integration was not an important topic for employers in the city – or as one of them put it: “I’ve been part of the board for 7,5 years now and I have never seen this topic on the agenda” (N-A-11). All interviewed employers highlight that they are not aware if other companies had employed refugees and/or what the support structure for refugees looked like in the city. It appeared as if employers or employer associations were not necessarily taking the lead in promoting the labor market integration of refugees. However, overall, it proved to be rather challenging to invite employers for an interview which is why no concluding observation can be made with regards to the role of employers in the four localities.

As previously mentioned, at the national level, trade unions are involved (in this policy area) in various ways: 1) through campaigns and lobbying at the national level with the goal to improve the labor market position for migrants (especially labor migrants, but also refugees), 2) through raising awareness internally among union members for the topic of diversity and inclusion, or 3) through offering trainings for companies with regards to the employment of refugees (N-CNV). Some regional union offices have in the past set up programs specifically for migrants/refugees, for example to support them during their application process (N-D-15).

5.3 Policies, initiatives, and practices that foster or hinder access

At the regional level, (some) labor market regions have made an ‘inclusive labor market’ part of their agenda and/or have set up projects particularly targeting refugees. In 2018, the labor market region in Drenthe has, for instance, initiated the project “Screening and Matching Status Holders”.

At the local level, some municipalities have mentioned the topic of labor market integration and participation in their policies (albeit to varying degrees), and they collaborate with various regional and local actors to facilitate access to the labor market.

In **municipality A**, the coalition agreement clearly states that “we want newcomers to learn Dutch as fast as possible and start working” (p. 5). In collaboration with the main non-public service provider for integration and other volunteer organizations, the municipality actively ‘matches’ (brings together) refugees and employers so that “refugees can start working as fast as possible” (p. 5). The municipality has continuously channeled funds under the Participation Act towards the main non-profit service provider for integration, to offer a more tailored approach to refugees (who would otherwise be primarily supported by the regional WSP which does not only target refugees). In doing so, the employee at the service provider for integration is able to deliver ‘maatwerk’ (customized work); she knows the persons already because they also receive social support and usually follow language courses provided by the same organization (‘everything under one roof approach’). She explains her way of working, taking for example into account the previously described difficulties for highly educated persons to find ‘qualified’ work, their personal background and living situation:

What is my work style? If someone says, I'm a lawyer, I've worked as a lawyer for years, I want to become a lawyer here too, I never say no. I'm going to create awareness first. That's very important, they have to realize themselves. What do I have to do here? What steps do I need to take to become a lawyer again in the Netherlands? It starts with the language. The language has to be at C1 level., you have to take a number of courses and build up the work experience and then you can work as a lawyer. So, what do I do? I go to Indeed [online job search engine] and I show job vacancies of lawyers. And then I show what is required. Do you have that? [...] I say we can follow that path, can't we? I don't say no, but this and this and this and these steps have to be done, so I make him a drawing, I write it out. And then they go to their teacher, to their integration guide, they also make that drawing and on the basis of that we look each year, where are you now, what are your possibilities. But in the Netherlands, when you are done with the civic integration, you have to work. It is very annoying if you are not yet at the level of a lawyer, but that is a dream job (droombaan). You have to have a bread job (broodbaan) first. And a bread job means, you're done with the integration, you can work now. [...] So, that's also my strength. I look at each person, I really provide customization. All of us here deliver customized work. We look at each individual. From the teacher, I hear how it goes at school, from the integration guide, I hear what has happened in their private lives over the years. And my goal is to make sure with the information I get from them to understand how ‘teachable’ he is. Has he done voluntary work, so has he already gathered some work experience? What is he good at? I do ask a lot of questions based on their CV, but what I also look at is, what does the family situation like? Can the woman already take care of the kids?



In **municipality B**, refugees receive support by the previously mentioned service provider which is also part of the regional WSP and thus offers its services to a broader target group. However, according to one employee (N-B-6) there is now more awareness among the ‘account managers’ with regards to some of the challenges facing refugees (e.g., different forms of communication, language, etc.) which is why they have started to directly seek the dialogue with the employers as well:

Anything we run into which doesn't work out, we take it to the employers. I know, for example, that one of the employers in the care sector has now said that they want to set up a special course for people who don't speak the language very well yet. So, they're obviously going to start with that, but it has to be done through account management. This has to be done through account management, and perhaps repeatedly, to make the employers realize that yes, the staff just isn't there. There is not much personnel now. But we [service provider] do have a lot of people but who have more ‘distance’ [to the labor market], so they have to adapt, set something up to make those people also fit in.

More generally, municipality B appears to have chosen a mainstream approach to immigrant integration, for example reflected in an overarching “Social Agenda” that pays attention to topics such as ‘social acceptance’ and ‘participation’ for *all* (vulnerable) residents in the community. They do not have a separate integration policy because integration is seen as integral part of the society (N-B-2, N-B-7, N-B-8).

Municipality C follows the principle of the national Participation Act that ‘everyone who can work, should work and participate’, clearly prioritizing work over education: “so the focus is more on work and not on developing the language and also not on looking yes, but what have you done and what can you do? Because in the Participation Act, of course, all work is appropriate work” (N-C-10). Or, as the employee of an NGO put it critically: the strategy is to “let the young refugees work, to let school on the side”. On the one hand, the local implementation of the Participation Act thus facilitates access to the labor market; on the other hand (as has been shown previously) it channels people, independent of their education, into low-skilled sectors of the labor market which often results in downward economic mobility and exclusion from specific labor market sectors (this dynamic was also described in locality B). In some cases, local officials tried finding individual solutions for their clients; however, the funding provided under the Participation Act leaves only limited leeway and officials had to “fight hard” (N-C-10) to be able to make an exception (e.g., continue financial support also for those choosing to pursue their education instead of working immediately).

Nonetheless, in the past various initiatives for refugees were started, including cycling lessons or a photography workshop, but according to a local official this did not necessarily increase their chances of finding a job which is why it is important to begin ‘low’, for example by finding



a work experience placement (*werkervaringsplek*) first (N-C-5). The respondent further explains that ‘social employers’ play an important role here because they give vulnerable groups the chance in their company; the pressure to find new staff due to the current labor shortage is another incentive for many employers to hire refugees and ‘overlook’ some of the other stricter language and qualification requirements (N-C-5). Another local official describes that in 2018/2019 there was a project in place to foster integration of refugees in the labor market; however, the additional project did not get extended because of the re-structuring of the municipality and the concomitant implementation of a neighborhood-based approach which implied moving away from a target-group specific approach.

In the city’s Coalition Agreement (2018-2022), “integration” or related terms such as inclusion are not mentioned. The agreement focuses instead on the more general description of its integral approach in the social domain: here the focus lies on “the continuous development of the integral approach regarding care in relation with poverty, job opportunities and participation because of the issues’ interrelatedness” (p. 10). The municipality has not designed a specific policy specifically addressing migrant/refugee integration more comprehensively. Instead, there are other ‘overarching’ policy documents that cover aspects that appear to be relevant for integration as well, such as policy programs related to “economy and participation”.

One aspect that stood out in the interviews with respondents in **locality D** is the municipality’s close collaboration with local employers with whom the local government has initiated various pilots and partnerships to facilitate labor market integration (N-D-9, N-D-11, N-D-14).

While there is no separate integration policy, refugees are explicitly mentioned in other documents such as the Coalition Agreement (2018-2022) and the Governance Program (2018-2022). The desired goal is to “let refugees actively participate in the community” so that they can find their ‘place’ (Coalition Agreement, p. 10) and “feel like a resident as fast as possible” (Governance Program, p.3). Language, voluntary work, employment, and integration in the neighborhood are mentioned as key factors for an active participation. Importantly, integration is linked to other policy areas such as work or care. This integral approach to integration is also mentioned by the member of the local government: “Poverty issues, income issues, integration – they are all related. You therefore have to make that connection between the policy areas.” (N-D-11)

5.3.1 Interim conclusion

Summarizing insights on labor market integration across the four localities, municipalities make use of the existing structure of the ‘Employer Service Points’ (WSP) to help job seeking refugees to find a job and to support employers when hiring a refugee (or another person falling under the Participation Act). Yet, while localities B and C appear to collaborate more closely with the regional network of labor market actors, locality A has opted to proactively

involve the local non-profit service provider for integration to offer a customized support for refugees, and locality D has dedicated *klantmanagers* in place who focus on the target group of refugees more specifically. Existing legal regulations and policies both foster and hinder access to (paid) employment – as has been shown previously. On the one hand, they promote the inclusion of particular target groups in the labor market; on the other hand, they create a layered system of exclusion where only specific – namely low-skilled – sectors of the labor market appear to be more easily accessible. Local labor market conditions and demands as well as language and professional qualification requirements set by employers reinforce the inaccessibility of certain labor market segments. Local NGOs and organizations as well as and voluntary initiatives help to overcome some of these obstacles by offering additional language support (all localities), development opportunities (locality C) or traineeships (locality A) to gain some first work experience.

5.4 Specific target groups

Once refugees are registered in a municipality, they receive social welfare benefits. They then fall under the national Participation Act. The national Participation Act regulates that municipalities are expected to provide additional support for those who can work but are not able to find a job by themselves (e.g., persons with a ‘distance’ to the labor market, persons with a ‘work restriction’). The goal of the Participation Act thus is creating more jobs for more people to increase labor market participation.

Hence, under the Participation Act refugees are treated as ‘regular persons’ with a distance to the labor market. Some municipalities have work coaches or *klantmanagers* that focus more particularly on refugees as a target group – but they are still ‘bound’ by the funding provided under the Participation Act. In some municipalities non-profit service providers or other local/national organizations (locality A) offer a more tailored approach to refugees and/or newcomers more generally.

As has previously been mentioned, none of the four localities has a targeted integration policy. Yet, three of the four municipalities (A, B and D) mention the integration of newcomers/ refugees explicitly in their coalition agreement, governance programs or in overarching policies for the social domain. Here, municipality A stands out because it has also designed an “Inclusive City Policy” and an “Anti-discrimination Agenda”, explicitly positioning itself as a welcoming and inclusive municipality and focusing not only on integration, but also on broader societal challenges such as discrimination. Municipalities B and D see their role in helping newcomers overcome certain obstacles (related to their refugee background or language skills) to be able to fully participate in society. Municipality C mentions refugees in more generic policy programs on labor market participation or housing, but not exclusively with regards to their overall integration process. Respondents across localities explain that they have not developed a targeted integration policy because of the local governments’

previously limited role in this policy domain (B, C, D) and because of the rather low number of recognized refugees moving to/being assigned to the locality each year (B, D). Furthermore, the topic of integration is seen as being closely interrelated with other policy areas such as work, care, or the social domain which is why localities seem to have opted for a more mainstream, integrated approach instead of a target group-specific policy (B, C, D).

CASE	Major obstacle(s)	Actor(s) involved	Measure(s)	Target group(s)
Municipality A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language - Personal background (more difficult when low(er) educated, older; for women with children; differing cultural background) - Lacking willingness and/or awareness of employers - Inaccessibility of some labor market segments - Impact of Participation Act - Discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipality - WSP - Main integration non-profit service provider - Other initiatives & organization providing language support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation & integration of refugees as topic in coalition agreement - Customized support through main integration non-profit service provider - Social corporation (traineeships) 	<p>Amongst others, refugees (under Participation Act), 'newcomers'</p>
Municipality B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language - Personal background (more difficult when low(er) educated, older; for women with children; differing cultural background) - Inaccessibility of some labor market segments (channeling into low-skilled sectors) - Impact of Participation Act - Temporary employment/precarious working conditions - Discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipality - WSP - Other local organizations providing language support (library!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation of vulnerable groups as goal defined in Social Agenda - Support by service provider 	<p>Amongst others, refugees (under Participation Act)</p>

Municipality C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language - Personal background (more difficult when low(er) educated, older; for women with children; differing cultural background) - Inaccessibility of some labor market segments (channeling into low-skilled sectors) - Impact of Participation Act - Temporary employment/precarious working conditions - Discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipality - WSP - Other local organizations providing language support (main integration service provider, library) & project for self-development (Humanitas) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support provided under Participation Act by work coach in the municipality and via WSP; 2018/2019 additional program for labor market integration for refugees 	<p>Amongst others, refugees (under Participation Act)</p>
Municipality D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language - Personal background (more difficult when low(er) educated, older; for women with children; differing cultural background) - Lacking willingness and/or awareness of employers - Less job opportunities (rural area) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipality - (WSP) - Other local and national organizations providing language support - Employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation & integration of refugees as topic in coalition agreement and governance program - Support provided by <i>klantmanager</i> in the municipality - Pilot projects with local employers 	<p>Amongst others, refugees (under Participation Act)</p>

Table 5: Case-by-case summary of results/findings regarding the area of employment

6. Access to other resources & services

6.1 Civic Integration Act (2013) & social support

After their arrival in the municipality, refugees start following a civic integration trajectory. In the Netherlands, this trajectory is described as *'inburgering'* and refers to the newcomer's obligation to learn the Dutch language and culture and to pass an exam at the end of the process. Usually, persons have up to three years to integrate; yet, in some cases (e.g., due to illness, or having a baby) extra time can be granted. During their civic integration, they receive



‘social support’ under the Civic Integration Act, a tailored form of support specifically for refugees provided by non-public service providers/NGOs which receive funding from the municipalities to complete this task.

Various respondents across municipalities identify challenges deriving from the Civic Integration Act that was implemented in 2013. Importantly, in January 2022 a new Civic Integration Act was implemented, addressing many of the problems related to the old law. The observations made by the respondents thus apply to the old legal regulation.

Multiple respondents reflect critically on the (old) system in place, claims moving back and forth between defining the old law as too loosely applied and thus difficult to supervise or too narrowly defined and hence constraining. While some stress that the current civic integration program is “too soft” and requires the definition and enforcement of stricter requirements at the municipal level (N-B-7; N-C-6), others disagree and argue that the focus of the old integration policymaking approach was too restrictive and aimed too much at the *fast* integration of people, overlooking the personal situation of individuals (incl. psychological trauma and stress) (N-A-2, N-A-5). A member of the municipal council in municipality A describes for instance that the old integration law dictated refugees’ integration process (language learning first, then voluntary work, then paid employment), leaving them little room for self-development (N-A-5, N-B-9; N-D-14). According to an employee of the local welfare organization in municipality B, the task of ‘social support’ focuses too narrowly on administrative aspects and is “too individualistic” (focusing on individual progress regarding language, finding a job), lacking a more holistic approach to integration which includes the broader community (facilitation of social interactions between newcomers and residents) (N-B-1). Critique related to the old Civic Integration Act is also vocalized by other respondents who (for example) describe the former law as being ‘politically tinted’ and preventing integration rather than facilitating it (N-D-7, N-D-14).

Respondents also observe that the social support stops ‘too early’, leaving people at risk of falling between ‘*shore and ship*’ (N-B-5; N-B-1). Refugees are not considered to be ‘ready’ after 1,5 to three years of receiving support (N-A-1, N-A-3, N-A-11; N-B-5; N-C-4). After the successful completion of their civic integration, the responsibility for support is usually transferred to local welfare organizations that ‘operate’ in neighborhoods and target all residents; they thus are not able to provide the same tailored support. A local employer in the medium size city points to the consequences of the missing support for a person’s the labor market integration:

What I notice is that there are some, they have completed their civic integration. They have passed their Dutch test. They then receive a residence status, but that doesn't mean they're ready to really integrate or participate. Fortunately, there is Google translate. What I also see is that they actually have their own community, so our Syrian sits 3 nights per week in



Amsterdam in the Syrian community. Because he didn't know anybody in the Netherlands, right? He had to pay back a lot of things at one point, because the rent subsidy went down. But we had had a pay rise, then he had to pay that back. Yes, that was announced, but because he didn't understand what the letter said, he suddenly had to pay a very large amount, which got him into trouble. We as a company had to invest a lot of time and energy, also from the administration, to help him understand what the letter said. They usually go to someone from their own community, but they also only know half of it and then things go really wrong. The guidance stops too soon.”

Some respondents also identify challenges with regards to the distribution of responsibility under the old Civic Integration Act. With the implementation of the Civic Integration Act in 2013, refugees themselves became responsible for their integration. This meant that refugees received a loan from the national implementing body DUO to pay for their civic integration and to complete the ‘*inburgeringsexamen*’ at the end of the trajectory. Moreover, according to many respondents, the privatization of (parts of the) civic integration trajectory (language courses were offered by private language course providers) had led to language schools misusing funds, offering poor quality education, and delaying people’s integration process (N-A-2; N-B-8). The consequences of this ‘failed’ national integration policy were felt at the local level, but municipalities and local actors had limited tools to supervise the process or enforce other regulations, despite agreeing that the system in place was not working (N-B-4, N-B-7, N-B-8). For persons following the civic integration program this meant that while they had ‘easy’ access to the language courses as part of their civic integration trajectory, they were depended on the language school to provide good quality education – which was not always the case.

Lastly, a representative from the library notes that “social support” and ‘free’ access to language courses under the Civic Integration Act is only selectively offered to refugees and not to family migrants (“who came here for love”) or EU labor migrants, excluding these ‘types’ of migrants from accessing the provided services and/or making access more difficult due to higher costs (N-B-5; N-C-4). With this last point, we now turn to some final reflections on the impact of legal status on migrants’ access to services.

6.2 Legal status & narratives of temporality

A person’s way of entering the Netherlands and – relatedly – their ‘(il)legal’ status given to them, is a crucial factor with regards to the (in)accessibility of rights and services. The national legal framework may act here as a constraining factor for those who are (for example) still in their asylum procedure, or whose asylum application was rejected. But also, those who entered the Netherlands as family migrants or ‘expats’ (knowledge migrants) may face some restrictions and difficulties in accessing certain services.



The differentiation along the lines of a person's '(il)legal' status and the unequal distribution of rights and resources (Morris, 2003), already starts in the reception facilities. Here, the group of asylum seekers (whose asylum decision is still pending) is divided into '*kansrijke*' (good prospect to stay) and '*kansarme*' (less prospect to stay) asylum seekers. Asylum seeker with a good prospect to stay have earlier access to certain services such as language courses offered in the reception center by trained teachers (as opposed to other asylum seekers who can participate in courses provided by volunteers (N-COA)). Moreover, they are offered a so-called 'screening interview' before their actual issuance of a residence permit. In the screening interview, '*kansrijke*' asylum seekers provide information about their educational background and work experience in the country of origin, their ambitions regarding employment and education in the Netherlands, or their existing social network (such as family members already living in the Netherlands). Based on these criteria, COA 'matches' the persons with a region/municipality (VreemdelingenVisie, 2020).

Respondents across municipalities mention likewise that a person's status – and nationality – matters as it influences their integration experience and determines access to important services (N-A-4, N-A-7, N-A-13; N-B-5, N-B-8; N-D-15).

Recognized refugees who live in a municipality, have access to 'free' language courses, that is, under the old Civic Integration Act they did not have to pay back the loan given by DUO – if they pass the exam or get an exemption on time. Moreover, they receive social welfare benefits from the beginning and additional social support as well as support with regards to labor market integration. Or as one respondent put it: "Refugees get everything, they do not have to pay" (N-C-8). The situation looks differently for family migrants (N-B-5; N-C-4): they also have to integrate (pass the civic integration exam), but they either have to pay for the courses themselves, take a loan from DUO (and pay it back later) or study at home to avoid higher costs (also mentioned my post-2014 migrants interviewed for WP5). 'Knowledge migrants' or expats as well as EU citizens are exempt from the obligation to integrate – which, in turn, means that if they would still like to do so, they would have to cover the costs themselves. Moreover, many of these migrants do not have access to additional social support provided by local non-profit service providers or other activities, which may also result in loneliness (N-B-5).

Depending on the funding, some organizations should only provide services to people with a residence permit; consequently, asylum seekers still living in reception centers are formally not allowed to participate. In practice, they are sometimes still given access to certain activities. A respondent (who did not want her affiliation to be made public) described that the 'logic' behind this regulation is that the state only wants to 'invest' in those people who are (most likely) staying as – according to this logic – there is no need to spend money on refugees who are not going to stay anyway. Other respondents argue similarly that from a national perspective certain services and activities should not be offered to people without status to avoid giving false hope. One respondent in locality D states for example:



We also have people who don't have status yet. I don't know yet whether that is the intention or purpose of the national government policy. [...] I also used to work at an asylum seekers' center a long time ago and then we were actually not allowed to offer activities to people without a status, to offer that prospect of staying in the Netherlands, because then they could get their hopes up. But anyway, we don't make the distinction.

Not only NGOs are confronted with the 'dilemma' of offering services to persons without a status or persons with a rejected asylum claim, as becomes clear in the case of municipality A: In case of rejected asylum seekers, national (COA's) policy aims at enforcing their return, while the municipality considers rejected asylum seekers living in the local reception center part of the local community, 'deserving' to be included as well (despite not having an official legal status) (N-A-8, N-A-7). Respondents from local organizations in the same city describe similarly that they have difficulties offering their services to rejected asylum seekers because from a national policy perspective they 'are not supposed to integrate' (N-A-3, N-A-4, N-A-5).

Here it becomes apparent that the goal of the national *migration* policy may be contradictory or at odds with (local) *integration* policies. The (political) goal of migration policy is seemingly to prevent uncontrolled (high) influx of migrants, and to not appear 'too welcoming' for those who may not stay or who are supposed to return; however, at the local level, these restrictive regulations may delay the integration process for those who may get a residence permit at a later stage or exclude those with a rejected claim who are still factually living in the localities and are included to some extent, especially if their children attend local schools (N-B-2, N-A-9). The representative of the Ministry of Justice and Security describes likewise the conflict between the migration policy perspective (determine if the person in the reception center is allowed to stay or not) and the integration policy perspective (start with participation as fast as possible once they are in the reception center).

It further becomes clear that the design of policies and the provision of services is closely connected to different *narratives of temporality*. Looking at the access given to recognized refugees, it could be argued that only recognized refugees are targeted by the Civic Integration Act because it is assumed that they are going to stay long-term (as opposed to rejected asylum seekers or migrants from safe countries whose integration should not be fostered). A similar logic – but arguably with different consequences – can be applied when analyzing the selective access given to 'knowledge migrants'/expats or labor migrants from EU countries. The coordinator of a local language café in the medium size town elaborates:

Expats don't have to integrate, they obviously don't stay in the Netherlands, so you could say, in fact the Netherlands won't really have anything from them in the future, so yes, I can understand that you do not invest any money in them. Besides, these are often people with a high international education who can manage in English and so on. But I also think, I would actually like it if almost everyone gets the chance to get the civic integration.



These and other statements reflect the underlying assumption that only people who have the intention to stay or are assumed to stay 'have' to integrate and follow the civic integration trajectory. How people enter a country (regularly/irregularly) very much appears to define their integration trajectory: the 'category' they are put in (asylum seeker with more or less chances to stay, recognized refugee, expat, seasonal worker/EU migrant, family migrant) is closely linked to a policy (or no policy in some cases), in turn, determining their access to available rights and services. Importantly, non-public actors, including volunteers, may not define their work along the same categorical lines.

Finally, these narratives of temporality also intersect with notions of deservingness that may play into the policy design and service provision. It is often mentioned that refugees "do not just come like that" which implies that they have a good reason to come to the Netherlands because of the unsafe situation in their country of origin and thus are deserving of the right to stay and integrate. Here, a differentiation is often made between actual refugees whose stay is 'well justified' and migrants from safe countries who are not supposed to stay and are for example described as causing nuisance (N-D-5). With regards to highly skilled knowledge migrants and EU labor migrants, their contribution to the labor market appears to form the basis of their deservingness and especially in the case of the former 'less' is asked in return (for example, no obligation to learn the Dutch language). Here, there is a substantial difference to the case of recognized refugees who are *given* protection (together with money/resources to 'integrate') and in return it seems as if they are expected to show commitment, learn the language, and even accept jobs that may not 'align' with their previous experience or educational background (N-C-14).

7. Conclusion

In this report, we looked at local policies, initiatives, and practices addressing post-2014 migrants' access to housing, employment and other crucial resources or services. When looking at the access to housing and employment it becomes apparent that the situation at the local level is inevitably linked to developments at the broader, national level.

7.1 Access to housing

First, regarding **access to housing**, the accumulation of two 'crises', as the Netherlands is currently experiencing a 'housing crisis' and a 'reception crisis', informs the integration of refugees on the Dutch housing market. Importantly, municipalities are required by law to provide housing for recognized refugees. We showed that both the 'housing crisis' and the 'reception crisis' have impacted the municipalities' ability to fulfil this legal obligation and thus influenced refugees' access to housing in the four localities. Respondents across municipalities highlight that the national 'housing crisis' has led to an overall shortage of affordable (social)



housing, thus making it more difficult for municipalities and housing corporations to allocate suitable housing to refugees in the expected time frame – resulting in an extended stay of refugees with a residence permit in the reception center. The ‘reception crisis’, in turn, has increased the pressure on local governments to find housing for refugees linked to their municipality because the available reception facilities have not been able to compensate for the inflow of new asylum seekers and offer recognized refugees a (safe) place to stay at the same time. When comparing the four localities, we noticed that the municipalities in the East of the Netherlands (C & D) have had less problems with meeting their target in this regard because the local housing markets have (until recently) been less tense compared to the housing market in the densely populated West of the country (respondents in municipality C and D). Until recently, municipality D was even ‘ahead of its task’ (N-D-10), that is, the municipality was offering more housing to refugees than legally required. Moreover, municipality C has on average a higher share of social housing and some refugees have found housing on the ‘free market’ via personal contact (N-C-9). Nonetheless, respondents in all four municipalities note that the increasingly tense housing market in the localities have fueled feelings of competition and resentment toward refugees among local residents who often have faced difficulties themselves to find affordable housing. Structural conditions and previous policy decisions (demographic trends and buying/keeping of social housing stock) inform municipalities capacities to receive and accommodate incoming refugees.

Another societal dynamic that is repeatedly mentioned in the interviews were **tensions between newcomers and long-term residents** in neighborhoods due to perceived differences in lifestyle and ‘culture’, potentially resulting in feelings of alienation among local residents. This dynamic was particularly visible in the rural area in Drenthe (locality D) where residents have complained about the manners in which newcomers used their curtains and their ‘untidy gardens’. In other municipalities it is similarly mentioned that in some neighborhoods with a high(er) share of refugees, conflicts have emerged in the past, also reflecting the (perceived) segregation between newcomers/migrant communities and the long-term (Dutch) population. This ‘lack of mixing’ is often described as problematic and as hindering integration because certain groups would ‘only stick together’ and stay in their own communities.

This segregation is closely related to the **spatial concentration of social housing in particular neighborhoods** which made it more difficult for housing corporations to distribute newcomers (evenly) across the municipality. Despite difficulties of distribution, respondents from the housing corporations explained that finding housing for large families and a high number of ‘single persons’ has proven to be particularly challenging because of the conditions of the local housing market. This aspect is especially mentioned in municipalities B and C.

Besides these national and societal dynamics as well as local housing market-related challenges, local politics/governments have shaped access to housing for refugees. As previously mentioned, in the Netherlands, municipalities can (but do not have to) prioritize refugees in accessing housing. For instance, localities A, B and D have all opted to keep the



‘priority’ regulation for refugees which grants this target group priority access to social housing. Municipality C, however, has taken a different approach by treating refugees as regular potential tenants – a decision which could be related to the municipality’s more restrictive approach to integration and its political conservative-right orientation.

Overall, we saw that access to housing for recognized refugees is highly selective, channeling this particular group into the social housing system, while excluding others’ who have a different status and have entered the Netherlands via different (legal) pathways. While recognized refugees are offered accommodation by municipalities and have therefore ‘guaranteed’ housing, other groups such as labor migrants face the challenge of finding housing on the ‘free market’ and are often subjected to discrimination (N-FNV_1). Importantly, while guaranteed, the assigned housing may not always be satisfactory as social housing in the localities is often located in old, post-war neighborhoods.

7.2 Access to employment

Second, regarding **access to employment**, the integration of refugees is informed by an increasing shortage of (skilled) labor in the Dutch economy, which is also mirrored in some of the localities. There has been a continuous high demand for labor in particular sectors, such as agriculture, *horeca* (hotel and restaurants) and logistics – sectors in which many refugees find (temporary) employment. A recently published report by Statistics Netherlands (2021) showed that almost 30% of employed refugees who arrived in 2014 work in the temporary employment sector (*uitzendbranche*), followed by the hospitality industry (22%) and the trade sector (19%). Most refugees arrived in 2014 have a part-time job (73%) and a temporary contract (84%); only 3% are self-employed. In some localities these trends were visible as well (especially in localities B and C).

Overall, respondents across all localities identify various challenges and obstacles with regards to the labor market integration of post-2014 migrants, especially refugees. These **challenges and obstacles** are related to various levels, namely individual, economic, policy and governance, and societal levels. First, the individual level refers to a person’s **(lack of) language skills** which are described as crucial to finding employment as well as a person’s personal background. Here, factors such as educational background, ethnicity, age, gender, and mental health are said to influence a person’s chances of finding employment in various, often intersecting ways. For example, having a lower educational background and being older appears to slow down language learning which, in turn, impedes the chances of finding (skilled) employment. Second, at the economic level, **employers’ willingness and openness to hire refugees**, the **‘voluntary/unpaid work trap’ as well as precarious working conditions** play another role in determining a person’s economic trajectory and mobility. While refugees are often able to find voluntary or unpaid work, the ‘jump’ to actual paid employment proves to be quite difficult, ‘trapping’ refugees in situation where they are technically working but do

not get paid for it. Third, at the policy and governance level it becomes apparent that under the **national Participation Act, refugees are often channeled into the low-skilled sector** of the labor market, without considering their personal background and aspirations. This dynamic appears to be more pronounced in localities B and C where refugees were (supposedly) also ‘pushed’ towards employment early on. Finally, at the societal level **discrimination** against refugees – but also labor migrants – has a negative influence on people’s chances to find long-term sustainable employment under fair working conditions.

Importantly, we showed that existing legal regulations and policies both foster and hinder access to (paid) employment. On the one hand, the national Participation Act promotes the inclusion of particular target groups in the labor market; on the other hand, policies may create a layered system of exclusion where only specific sectors of the labor market appear to be (more easily) accessible. Local labor market conditions and demands as well as language/qualification requirements set by employers reinforce the inaccessibility of certain labor market segments.

7.3 Access to social support and the role of legal status

Third, **social support**: the national Civic Integration Act defines who is ‘obliged’ to integrate, that is, who has to follow a mandatory civic integration trajectory and pass an exam at the end. The Act further regulates that refugees receive additional social support by the municipalities during their civic integration, helping them with important administrative tasks and providing information and help during the process. While respondents note that the social support often stops too early – when refugees are not ‘ready yet’/not able to ‘manage’ by themselves –, it also becomes clear that social support is selectively offered to refugees who arrive new in a municipality (and not necessarily to other ‘types’ of migrants). Moreover, refugees are exempt from having to pay back their loan from the national government if they manage to pass the exam or have gotten an exemption from having to pass the exam. The same regulation does not apply to other groups, such as family migrants, who have to pay for the courses themselves or get a loan which has to be paid back later, making access to language courses more difficult for this group.

When looking at the access to housing, employment, and other services such as the social support or ‘free’ language courses, it becomes clear that one of the determining factors defining access to these services is a person’s legal status. That is, certain policies and services are primarily targeting refugees who are linked to the municipality, conversely excluding those who are still waiting for their status, who do not have an official status at all (rejected asylum seekers), or who came via different pathways altogether (labor migrants, family migrants). Both (civic) integration policies as well as more generic policies thus can result in complex dynamics of integration for some, while (actively) ‘disintegrating’ or excluding others.

Importantly, this stratifying and exclusionary effect of existing policies does not only start in the municipalities, but already at EU/national borders – when filtering the ‘desired’ from the ‘undesired migrant’ –, or in the reception centers – when distinguishing between asylum seekers with more or less prospects to stay or between (rejected) asylum seekers and recognized refugees, with the latter being able to move forward to a municipality and access available services and rights. Also, within the group of migrants, highly skilled knowledge migrants and EU migrants are placed in a ‘higher position’ within the stratified system due to their legal status, giving them (supposedly) more access to resources and rights. Recognized refugees appear ‘privileged’ in some aspect, for instance with regards to access to housing; but with regards to the labor market, they occupy a very vulnerable position, subjected to a ‘work first’ approach pushed forward by the national Participation Act and municipality’s desire to turn social welfare recipients into active labor force. Interestingly, the discourse about refugees drawing on their vulnerability and need of protection, appears to shift over time towards a more economic/self-sufficiency driven narrative in which their (economic) integration is supposed to be as “fast and efficient” as possible.

7.4 Comparing findings across localities

While respondents across all four localities identify similar issues, it was also mentioned that relevant issues were more pronounced in some localities than in others. Moreover, we showed that there were also differences in local approaches to address the issue at hand. We now turn to some reflections on possible reasons for these differences.

First, **economic positioning of localities and structural conditions** as explanatory factors: both locality A and locality B are located in the so-called Randstad, the densely populated, economically strong metropolitan area in the West of the Netherlands which, in turn, is assumed to have a positive impact on their local economy and existing job opportunities. In the small town in South Holland (locality B), it was, for instance, mentioned that the proximity to bigger cities provided residents with more job opportunities – also beyond the municipal borders. In both localities, ‘immigrant integration’ was less framed as a potential economic burden and in the past both municipalities have allocated more funding than legally required to this policy area (according to respondents). With regards to local labor market structures, locality B appears to have a higher demand for low-skilled labor (for instance due to its bigger agricultural sector), potentially resulting in more refugees ending up in the low-skilled sector (as reported by respondents; this issue was mentioned less in locality A).

In contrast to these two localities, locality D is located in the structurally rather weak and ‘poorer’ province Drenthe. Due to the locality’s geographical position, respondents argue that there are less job opportunities and – relatedly – more (perceived) competition between long-term residents and newcomers for scarce resources. The union representative explains this dynamic as follows: “I think there has also been an increasing division in ‘us versus them’

thinking because of the competition for labor and for housing [...] Drenthe is a very poor corner. People have actually been poor for a long time and the chances for unemployment have always been higher” (N-D-15). Locality C (small town in Overijssel) is similarly referred to as ‘poor city’ with a relatively high share of social welfare recipients. The municipality’s weaker structural conditions, combined with its conservative government, may explain why the municipal administration strictly follows a ‘work first’ approach, trying to ‘get people out’ of the welfare system as fast as possible. The topic of immigrant integration is here primarily defined as an economic issue, focusing on increased participation and self-sufficiency among refugees. While it is said that there are enough job opportunities, local employers have been hesitant in the past to employ refugees – a barrier that is slowly getting smaller due to an increased pressure resulting from a severe shortage of labor. Overall, refugees often appear to end up in the low-skilled sector (for instance in big logistics companies) and are given less chance to continue their education, similar to locality B. In both cities, the demands of the local labor market appear to play an important role in determining newcomers’ labor market trajectories – sometimes detrimental to their own aspirations.

Second, **political orientation** as explanatory factor: Local politics, and in particular the political affiliation of the alderman responsible for integration, appear to determine to what extent a locality has adopted a more restrictive or more social/welcoming approach to integrating newcomers. This can also be seen, for instance, when looking at access to housing and employment. As previously mentioned, the small town in Overijssel (C) with its rather right-conservative political orientation frames integration primarily in economic terms and implements the Participation Act rather strictly, for instance by relying on sanctions as policy tools and following a strict ‘work-first approach’. In contrast, in locality D respondents mentioned that they had never heard that sanctions in form of a benefit reduction had been implemented by the municipal administration. Municipality C has, moreover, decided not to make use of the priority regulation which would grant refugees a priority access to housing, but to treat them as regular tenants instead – which could be seen as a decision catering to the needs of a conservative electorate. The other three localities (A, B, D) decided consciously to keep the priority regulation. More generally, the medium sized town’s (A) left-progressive and Christian democratic political orientation appears to relate to its welcoming and open stance towards newcomers and the municipality’s active involvement in integration policymaking where ‘integration’ stands high on the political agenda and the main non-profit service provider for integration has an extra position to support refugees with their labor market integration. Similarly, in locality D, the alderman’s social-democratic orientation may explain the municipality’s social approach to immigrant integration, for instance reflected in the ‘softer’ implementation of the Participant Act and the position of *dedicated klantmanagers* in the municipality who were directly responsible for refugees (structure has changed now with the implementation of the new Civic Integration Act).

Third, **experience with diversity** as explanatory factor: While structural conditions and political orientation seem to explain differences as expected, diversity as influencing factor yields less clear-cut results. In both the medium size town in Utrecht (A) and the small town in Overijssel (C) more than 25% % of the local population has a migration background. While the former presents itself as a diverse and inclusive city and refers to its long experience with “people from different cultural backgrounds” in a positive way, the latter perceives the presence of ‘large ethnic communities’ primarily as a problem because of perceived tensions between these communities and their ‘failed’ integration (a view that is not necessarily shared by non-public actors). In the small town in South Holland (B) and the rural area in Drenthe (D), the ‘lack’ of diversity in rather homogeneous (white) communities seems to explain residents’ ambiguous attitudes towards newcomers from a different cultural background who are not following ‘local ways of living’. While locals’ attitudes towards newcomers are considered an important factor influencing decision-making, local politics seem to trump this relatively negative attitude among local populations. In both municipalities (B, D), the aldermen responsible for integration seem to draw on their Christian-democratic and social-democratic political values, respectively, to put integration on the political agenda and to justify their socially driven approach. Experience with diversity alone thus does not allow us to explain the policy approaches taken across all localities.

Finally, the **size of the municipality** as explanatory factor: Size seems to play a role in shaping access to housing and employment. In terms of access to housing, it may be easier to find (social) housing in areas where the housing market is less tense (for example in rural areas in the North), but in terms of employment there may be fewer job opportunities (especially for highly-skilled persons) in smaller municipalities – especially those that have a bigger agricultural sector.

Importantly, the different factors may also influence – even reinforce – each other. For example, the medium size town in Utrecht has more job opportunities both because of its size and because of its positionality in the Randstad. And the small town in Overijssel may allocate less funding to the integration of refugees both because of its conservative-right government and because of its difficult financial situation (it was repeatedly described as ‘poor city’). And in the rural area in Drenthe the small size as well as the composition of the municipality (with one central town and almost 30 very small villages where almost no refugees are allocated to) can explain why there are fewer job opportunities (less developed area), but also why long-term residents are more used to living in ‘their own (white) community’ where many seem to follow the same social rules.



FACTORS		Locality A Medium size town in Utrecht (West)	Locality B Small town in South Holland (West)	Locality C Small town in Overijssel (East)	Locality D Rural area in Drenthe (North-East)
STRUCTURAL CONDITION	Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economically 'better off', lower unemployment rate - More job opportunities due to economic positionality in Randstad + bigger city 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economically 'better off', lower unemployment rate - More job opportunities due to economic positionality in Randstad - Demand for low-skilled, highly intensive labor in agricultural sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Poor' city - Higher share of social welfare recipients - Demand for low-skilled labor in logistics sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Located in a 'poorer' region
	Potential influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Means available to allocate more funding, e.g., for additional staff to support refugees - Appears to influence labor market access positively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Means available to allocate more funding - Appears to influence labor market access positively, however: availability of job opportunities in low-skilled sector has led to channeling refugees into this sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less means available to allocate more funding → refugees seen as 'additional burden' - Availability of job opportunities in low-skilled sector has led to channeling refugees into this sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (Supposedly) less means available to allocate more funding - Overall fewer job opportunities
POLITICAL ORIENTATION	Situation	<p>Progressive government/ alderman</p> <p>→ open and welcoming approach towards migration and integration, 'inclusive city'</p>	<p>Christian-democratic alderman</p> <p>→ social approach to migration and integration (driven by idea of 'mercy' for people in need)</p>	<p>Conservative-right government</p> <p>→ restrictive approach to migration and integration (driven by neo-liberal idea of self-responsibility)</p>	<p>Social-democratic alderman</p> <p>→ social approach to migration and integration (driven by idea of solidarity)</p>

	Potential influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of priority regulation to facilitate access to housing - More allocation of funding than legally required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of priority regulation to facilitate access to housing - More allocation of funding than legally required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NO use of priority regulation - 'Law & Order' approach, strict enforcement of Participation Act (sanctions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of priority regulation to facilitate access to housing - 'Softer' interpretation and implementation of the Participation Act (no sanctions)
EXPERIENCE WITH DIVERSITY	Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long experience with diversity, high share of persons with a 'migration background' (25%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less experience with diversity, low share of persons with a 'migration background' (12%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long experience with diversity, high share of persons with a 'migration background' (27%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less experience with diversity, low share of persons with a 'migration background' (9%)
	Potential influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Embracing diversity as part of city identity - Drawing on prior experience with integration of newcomers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perception of 'mono-cultural', closed community → tensions between long-term residents and newcomers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problematizing of 'ethnic communities' and lack of mixing, sign of 'failed integration policy' → may have led to more restrictive approach towards new refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perception of 'mono-cultural', community with 'clear social norms' → tensions between long-term residents and newcomers → led to revision of housing vision to ensure a better distribution of refugees
SIZE	Situation	Medium size	Small town	Small town	Rural area
	Potential influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More job opportunities - Higher number of actors involved in the field of integration - Refugees less 'visible' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fewer actors involved - Overall lower number of refugees – less need for 'targeted' policy? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fewer actors involved - Overall lower number of refugees – less need for 'targeted' policy? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fewer actors involved - Less job opportunities - Less anonymity → refugees 'stand out more'

Table 6: Summary of main findings across localities

8. References

8.1 Legal documents

Title (translation/ <i>original</i>)	Date of enactment	Source
Civic Integration Act <i>Wet inburgering 2013</i>	First adopted in Nov 2006, changes applicable from January 2013 to December 2021	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0020611/2013-01-01
Civic Integration Act 2021 <i>Wet inburgering 2021</i>	First adopted in 2020, applicable from January 2022	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0044770/2022-01-01
Law Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers <i>Wet Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers</i>	Adopted in 1994, changes applicable from January 2020	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0006685/2020-01-01
Hosing Act 2014 <i>Huisvestingswet 2014</i>	Adopted in 2014, Changes applicable from January 2022	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0035303/2022-01-01
Participation Act <i>Participatiewet</i>	First adopted in 2006, Changes applicable from January 2015	https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015703/2015-01-01/1

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8.4 Local policy documents

Locality	Policy document	Year
Municipality A	Woonvisie 2011 – 2020	2011
	Action plan "Reception and Housing of Refugees"	2015
	Coalition Agreement (2018-2022)	2018
	Policy plan "Inclusive City" (2021-2026)	2021
	Anti-discrimination Agenda (2021-2026)	2021



Municipality B	Economic Agenda 2015 – 2019	2015
	Woonvisie 2015 – 2019	2015
	Program Integration	2016
	Coalition Agreement (2018-2022)	2018
	Social Agenda	2019
	Social Agenda, Policy 'meeting in the neighbourhood'	2019
	Woonagenda 2020 – 2024	2020
Municipality C	Action Plan for the Integration of Refugees	2017
	Policy Plan: Coalition against Loneliness (2019-2022)	2019
	Coalition Agreement (2018-2022)	2018
	Woonvisie 2020 – 2030	2020
	Implementation Agenda City Development	2021
	Strategic Policy Plan Social Domein 2022	2022
Municipality D	Action Plan Social Support and Participation Statement Trajectory	2016
	Woonvisie 2017 – 2020	2017
	Together Strong – Policy Plan Social Domain	2017
	Coalition Agreement (2018-2022)	2018
	Governance Program (2018-2022)	2018
	Action Plan Illiteracy	2020
	Woonvisie 2021+	2021

Appendix

Table 1: Overview of conducted interviews, relevant for the WP3 country report

- a. Locality A – 14 respondents, 8 completed surveys
- b. Locality B – 12 respondents, 7 completed surveys
- c. Locality C – 15 respondents, 6 completed surveys
- d. Locality D – 15 respondents, 6 completed surveys

No	Type	Acronym	Respondent	Survey
1	LOCALITY A	N-A-1	Employee of local non-profit service provider, responsible for integration	Yes
2		N-A-10	Employee of local non-profit service provider, responsible for labor market integration	No
3		N-A-2	Employee of a local NGO/non-profit service provider (focus on psychological support)	Yes
4		N-A-3	Employee of a local foundation/non-profit service provider (focus on work)	Yes
5		N-A-4	Employee of a local NGO/non-profit service provider (focus on language and social activities)	Yes
6		N-A-5	Member of municipal council	Yes
7		N-A-11	Two representatives of employers' organization (+ employers themselves)	No
8		N-A-6	Employee of local welfare organization	Yes
9		N-A-12	Former member of the local government, responsible for integration	No
10		N-A-7 N-A-8	Mayor and member of the local government, responsible for integration	Yes
11		N-A-9	Local official of the municipality, responsible for integration	Yes
12		N-A-13	Volunteer/coordinator of local initiative (focus on language support)	No
13		N-A-14	Local official of the municipality, responsible for housing	No
14		N-A-15	Employee of local real estate company	No
1	LOCALITY B	N-B-1	Employee of local non-profit service provider/welfare organization, responsible for social support of refugees	Yes
2		N-B-2	Local official of the municipality, responsible for integration	Yes



3		N-B-3	Employee of local real estate company	No	
4		N-B-10	Employee of local pro-migrant organization	No	
5		N-B-11	Employer, HR representative	No	
6		N-B-4	Employee of local NGO/non-profit service provider, welfare organization, responsible for social support of refugees	No	
7		N-B-12	Local resident, organizes workshop for newcomers	No	
8		N-B-5	Employee of local library, responsible for language support	Yes	
9		N-B-6	Employee of service provider, responsible for labor market integration	Yes	
10		N-B-8	Member of local government, responsible for integration	Yes	
11		N-B-7	Member of municipal council	Yes	
12		N-B-9	Former member and chairman of local employer association	Yes	
LOCALITY C					
1			N-C-9	Employee of local real estate company	No
2	N-C-1		Employee of national NGO/non-profit service provider, responsible for language	No	
3	N-C-2		Local official from the municipality, responsible for integration (policy development)	Yes	
4	N-C-3		Employee of local NGO (foundation)	Yes	
5	N-C-10		Local official from the municipality, responsible for labor market integration (policy implementation)	No	
6	N-C-4		Employee of local welfare organization, responsible for language	Yes	
7	N-C-5		Local official from the municipality, responsible for access to labor market	Yes	
8	N-C-11		Employer, HR representative	No	
9	N-C-7		Coordinator of local non-profit service provider, responsible for social support of refugees (N-C-7_1); volunteer (language coach) (N-C-7_2)	No	
10	N-C-6		Member of local government, responsible for integration	Yes	
11	N-C-12		Employee of non-profit service provider (psychological support)	No	
12	N-C-8		Two employees at national NGO (volunteer organization), focus on social support	Yes	



13		N-C-13	Employee of local welfare organization, responsible for neighborhood support	No
14		N-C-14	Employee of the union's regional office	No
15		N-C-15	Volunteer, local non-profit service provider, responsible for social support	No
1	LOCALITY D	N-D-1	Employee of local real estate company	Yes
2		N-D-2	Employee of national non-profit service provider, responsible for social support of refugees	Yes
3		N-D-3	Two representatives of national NGO (volunteer organization), language support and social activities	Yes
4		N-D-4	Employee of local welfare organization, responsible for social support for all residents	No
5		N-D-5	Member of municipal council, local party	No
6		N-D-6	Employee at local library, responsible for language support	Yes
7		N-D-12	Teacher and coordinator of local language school	No
8		N-D-7	Official/manager at local reception center	No
9		N-D-8	Two employees of local welfare organization, responsible for social support for all residents	Yes
10		N-D-13	Volunteer/coordinator at national NGO (volunteer organization), language support	No
11		N-D-14	Chairman of foundation working with undocumented migrants, and chairman of local "social advisory council"	No
12		N-D-9	Local officials of the municipality, responsible for integration (policy development and implementation) (N-D-9_1, N-D-9_2)	No
13		N-D-10	Member of municipal council	Yes
14		N-D-15	Employee of the union's regional office	No
15		N-D-11	Member of local government, responsible for integration	No



No	Type	Acronym	Respondent
1	NATIONAL	N-SZW	Official at Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW)
2		N-JenV_1	Official at Ministry of Justice and Security (JenV)
3		N-JenV_2	Official at Ministry of Justice and Security (policy officer)
4		N-COA	Employee at Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA)
5	REGIONAL	N-G40	Official working for a city network comprising 40 medium-sized cities, responsible for migration and integration
6		N-VNG	Official working for the Dutch Association of Municipalities (VNG)
7		N-Divosa 1	Regional coordinator Divosa
8		N-Divosa 2	Regional coordinator Divosa
9		N-SH	Official working for province South Holland, responsible for housing
10		N-O	Official working for province Overijssel, responsible for housing
11		N-D	Official working for province Drenthe, responsible for inclusion
12		N-FNV_1	Representative of union, responsible for topic migration
13		N-FNV_2	Representative of union, responsible for diversity
14		N-CNV	Representatives of union, responsible for trainings at companies about refugee inclusion



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